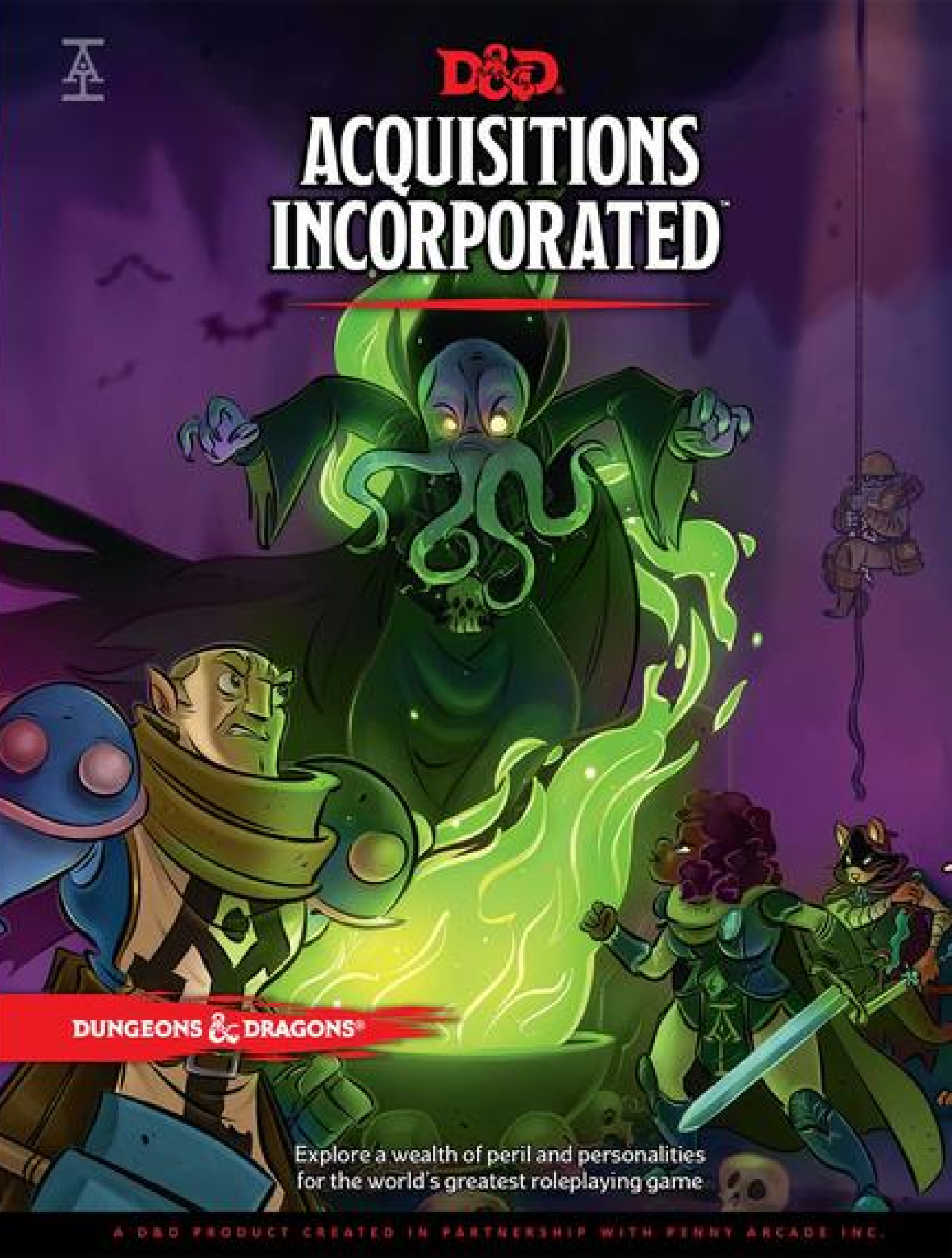
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This book was a collaboration between Wizards of the Coast and Penny Arcade. Members of the Wizards of the Coast team are marked with an asterisk.

Creative Directors: Jerry Holkins, Elyssa Grant, Scott Fitzgerald Gray
Designers: Shawn Merwin, Teos Abadía, Jerry Holkins, Scott Fitzgerald Gray
Producers: Elyssa Grant, Dan Tovar*
Associate Producer: Bill Benham*
Development: Shawn Merwin, Teos Abadía, Scott Fitzgerald Gray, Chris S. Sims, Ben Petrisor*, Jeremy Crawford*

Lead Editor: Scott Fitzgerald Gray
Editors: Michele Carter, Chris S. Sims, Scott Fitzgerald Gray, F. Wesley Schneider*
Indexing: Lyz Liddell

Art Directors: Mike Krahulik, Francisco Villaseñor, Shauna Narciso,* Kate Irwin*
Additional Art Direction: Jerry Holkins, Elyssa Grant, Scott Fitzgerald Gray
Graphic Designers: Amy T. Falcone, Emi Tanji,* Trish Yochum*
Cover Illustrator: Mike Krahulik
Interior Illustrators: Dabe Alan, Joy Ang, Darren M. A. Calvert, Daarken, Michele Giorgi, Gavin Greco, Leesha Hannigan, Tyler Jacobson, Nicholas Kay, Julian Kok, Dora Litterell, Nurse Normal, Aviv Or, Klaus Pillon, Carmen Sinek, Kris Straub, Kim Van Deun, Francisco Villaseñor, Chris Walton
Cartographers: Jared Blando, Jason Engle, Robert Lazzaretti, Mike Schley

Additional Design: Luke Lancaster, Zac Naoum
Additional Flavor Text Writers: Jerry Holkins, Mike Krahulik, Patrick Rothfuss, Morgan Webb, Amy T. Falcone, Kate Welch, Ryan Hartman, Kris Straub, Luke Lancaster

Production Services: Cynda Callaway,* Jefferson Dunlap,* David Gershman*

Brand and Marketing: Ryan Hartman, Elyssa Grant, Greg Tito,* Cate Olsen, Anna Vo,* Stride PR, 360 PR*

Additional Penny Arcade Team Members: Mike Buland, David Coffman, Beth Damis, Patrick Groome, Jeff Kalles, Lidija Piper, Joshua Price, Laura Stringer

***Additional D&D Team Members:** Bart Carroll, Pelham Greene, Adam Lee, Ari Levitch, Christopher Lindsay, Shelly Mazzanoble, Mike Mearls, Christopher Perkins, Satine Phoenix, Hilary Ross, Liz Schuh, Nathan Stewart, Greg Tito, Kate Welch, Richard Whitters, Shawn Wood

Full Acquisitions Incorporated Cast: Jerry Holkins as Ominifis Hereward "Omin" Dran, Mike Krahulik as James Winifred "Jim" Darkmagic III, Patrick Rothfuss as Viari, Morgan Webb as Môrgæn, WWE Superstar Xavier Woods as Bobby Zimeruski, Wil Wheaton as Aeofel Elhromane, Amy T. Falcone as Walnut Dankgrass, Ryan Hartman as Donaar Blit'zen, Kate Welch as Rosie Beestinger, Kris Straub as K'thriss Drow'b, Scott Kurtz as Binwin Bronzebottom, Holly Conrad as Strix Beestinger, Anna Prosser as Evelyn Marthain; with Dungeon Masters Jeremy Crawford and Christopher Perkins

ON THE COVER

Ominifis Hereward Dran, CEO of Acquisitions Incorporated, leads an assault on an Illithid lair in this vibrant piece by Mike Krahulik.

Disclaimer: Acquisitions Incorporated has made every legal, moral, and arcane attempt to ensure the safety of the information contained herein. That being said, should an employee meet their end in the service of Acquisitions Incorporated, we do reserve the right to reanimate you to perform light office tasks. Maybe you should read these contracts more carefully, eh?

620C7255000001 EN
ISBN: 978-0-7869-6690-5
First Printing: June 2019

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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TYLER JACOBSON

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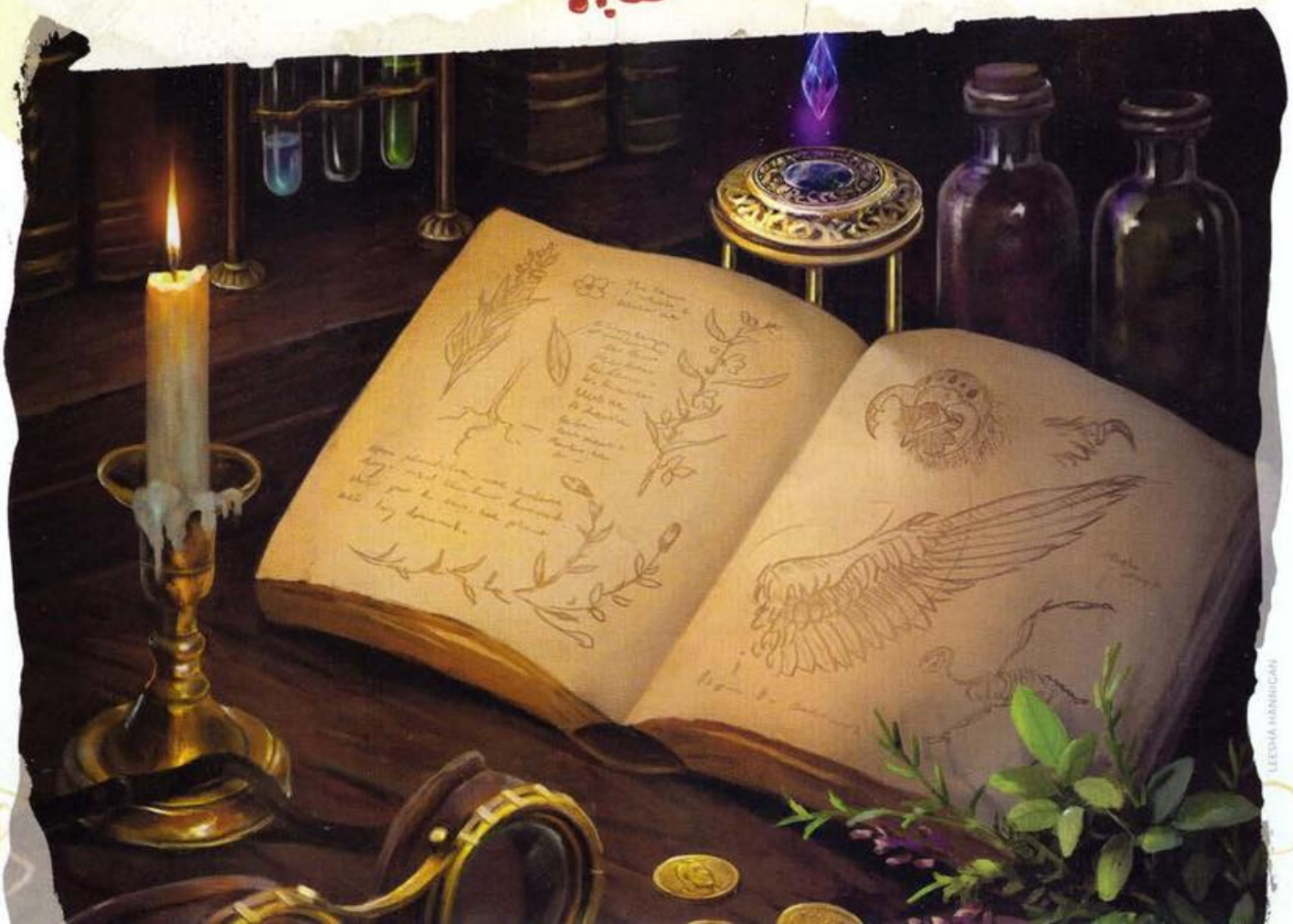
Preface

If you're reading this, good. That's really good. Because I'm about to write a bunch more stuff, and if you can actually read it, I won't be wasting my time. That's really the optimal scenario.

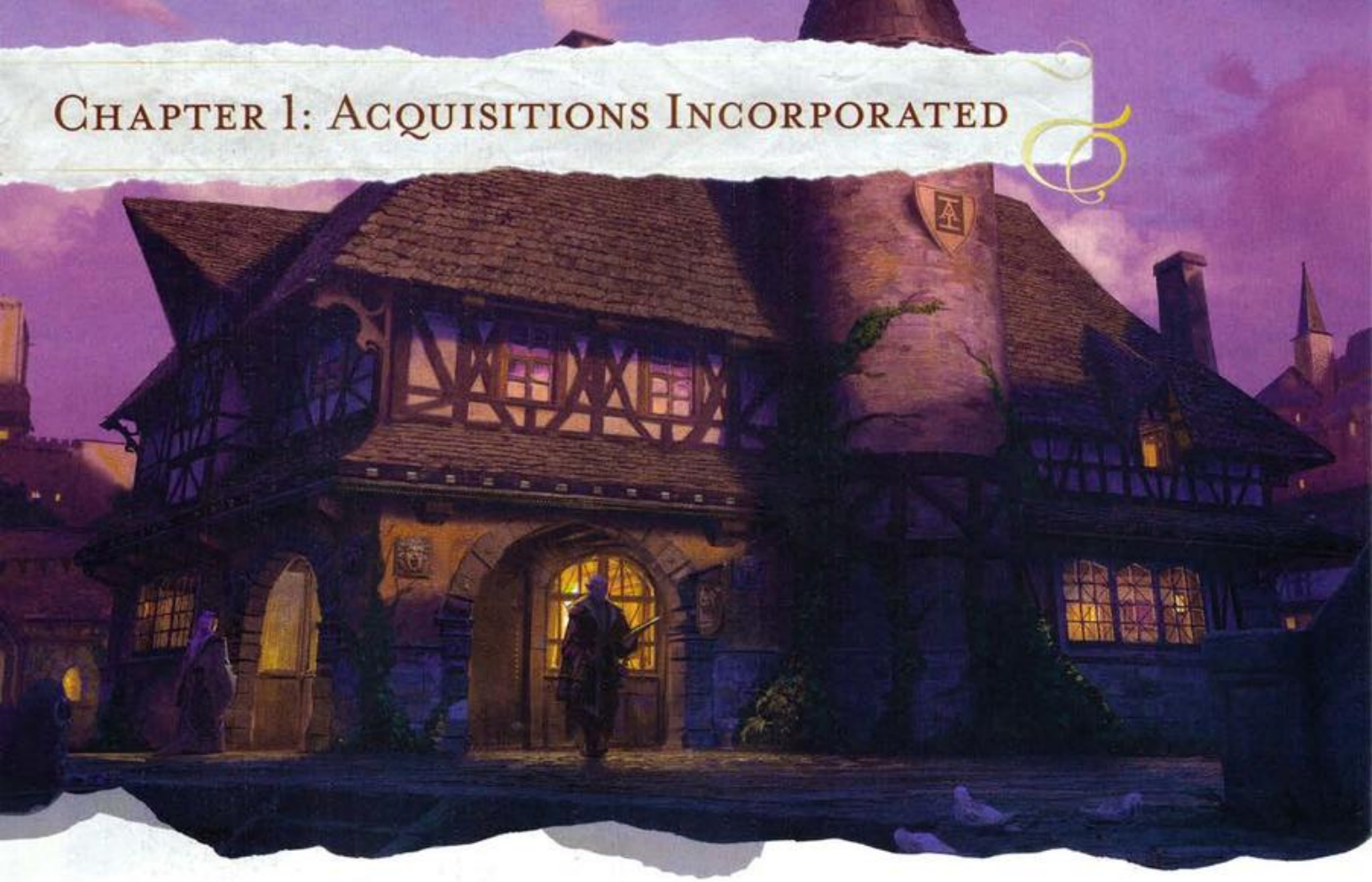
However you came by this document—nailed to your door in the night, stomped into the mud beneath a horse's hooves, or at one of our inviting recruitment drives—I'm glad. In fact, we're all glad—the entire Acquisitions Incorporated family welcomes you! This is the first step of the first part of a long trip to a distant land called Opportunity.

That's a metaphor for the kind of success you'll see while hitched up to our organization. There isn't really a place called Opportunity. Unless . . . there is. If Opportunity is a real place and you know how to get there, please let me know.

Ominifus Hereward Dran



Chapter 1: Acquisitions Incorporated



Acquisitions Incorporated was founded in Seattle, Washington, in a time spoken of in only hushed tones: the year 2009. It first saw life as a podcast, which, at the time, was an unusual way to play Dungeons & Dragons. The intervening decade saw Acq Inc take on many forms—streams, recorded content, comics, and, of course, live roleplaying shows. While these are all now completely normal ways to discover and enjoy D&D, back then, not so much. We just did it because it seemed like a cool idea, and ten years later, it seems like maybe we were right. Today, Acq Inc's adventures continue, dutifully chronicled online at acq-inc.com.

Our intention with Acquisitions Incorporated was to bring dark office comedy to a world of swords, sorcery, dungeons, and (dare we say) dragons. This book, created in concert with Wizards of the Coast, sets you up for success in your own fantasy-business endeavors. Chapter 1 provides an orientation for new franchise members, detailing how to start a game and play the Acquisitions Incorporated way. Chapter 2 explores the various positions within an Acq Inc franchise, introducing a variety of roles vital to an adventuring enterprise's success. Chapter 3 delves into backgrounds for Acq Inc franchise members, entrenching company goals at the core of their beings. In Chapter 4, all this comes together in an adventure taking characters from level 1 to 6, establishing a party's claim on a world they've begun to explore and strip-mine for profit.

Following these chapters, appendix A presents stalwarts of the Acquisitions Incorporated world, founding members and characters from the company's ongoing adventures. Appendix B details foes, from terrifying deep crows to infamous keg robots. Appendices C, D, and E conclude this guide with a variety of Acq Inc tools and treasures, from vehicles like the battle balloon to the mighty *Orrery of the Wanderer*.

Many hands worked diligently throughout the process of creating the Acquisitions Incorporated campaign and this resulting book. If you put your ear very close to the pages, you will hear us whisper, "thank you."

It's Just Business

With its roots set firmly in heroic fantasy, D&D might feel out of sync with modern-day business dealings. But the game and its settings are actually a perfect fit for such tropes. What better way to think of the big bad monster at the center of a web of even bigger and badder plans than as the CEO of a megacorporation, using every resource to dominate the market? What is an adventuring party but a limited-liability corporation, with each member contributing specialized skills to growing the brand and expanding a power base?

Likewise, hirelings, sidekicks, apprentices, and other paid laborers working for the heroes have been staples of Dungeons & Dragons since the earliest editions of the game. Charisma in AD&D was good for little other than determining how many followers your character might gather—and, more importantly, how much pain

KLAUS PILLON

and suffering you could put those followers through before they abandoned you. The world of Acquisitions Incorporated returns these hired helpers to prominence for their importance to the campaign story. And, of course, for comic effect.

When the characters are relatively low level, an Acquisitions Incorporated style of play can present them with even more hurdles to overcome. The often bizarre, unfeeling, and surreal elements of corporate and business life can add a degree of danger or absurdity to even the most run-of-the-mill adventuring. And as the characters attain higher levels—and their franchise attains higher rank—their connections to Acquisitions Incorporated can help dial up the stakes of any adventure path. In an Acq Inc campaign, every NPC is a potential customer. Every bit of treasure found is an investment in the franchise and its future. Every other would-be hero is the competition, and every villain is the head of Evil Incorporated, just begging for some market volatility.

Money, as they say, makes the world go around. And as is true in real life, so it goes in the fantasy realm. The far-reaching power of global corporations allied with political power doesn't just inform our own real world—it molds it. Bringing that concept of powerful corporations working with or against nobility to gain money, power, and influence into D&D adds another layer of depth to the story your campaigns create.

What Is Acquisitions Incorporated?

An Acquisitions Incorporated campaign has a unique texture, because it combines deeply ordinary clerical toil with multiverse-spanning stakes. And in the end, you never know which one of those tropes might save your life.

Acquisitions Incorporated is high fantasy by way of office comedy. Imagine the Fellowship of the Ring insisting they only trekked from nine to five. Think about Conan barbarously assailing his way up the corporate ladder. Or perhaps King Arthur insisting that Excalibur's real magic lie in brand awareness, or Robin Hood pivoting the Merry Men toward a pyramid scheme.

Starting your own Acquisitions Incorporated franchise means stepping into a world of possibility. It opens up countless adventure hooks, rules for building and growing your own personalized base of operations, and a way to introduce Acquisitions Incorporated's specific sense of farcical corporate culture, questionable morality, and unfolding narrative to your own game.

Within the world of Acquisitions Incorporated, the franchise is the center of brand expansion throughout the world of Faerûn and beyond, even as it provides a new set of tools for player expression and involvement. In a way, it provides players with a greater purpose to explore. And although entirely nonnegotiable, franchise fees are incredibly reasonable.

> Our integrated Intern Success Pathway is a robust, unparalleled system for reliable growth year-on-year while maximizing your downstream.
>
> —Omin Dran

A Corporate Prospectus

Throughout history, some people have had things and other people have wanted those things. But where most would gaze upon that arrangement and see an inescapable life of unfulfillment, Ominifis Hereward "Omin" Dran saw a business opportunity. Thus was Acquisitions Incorporated born. In the years since, Omin and longtime employee (though less-longtime friend) James Winifred "Jim" Darkmagic III have turned a talent for redistribution of property into a reputation as the multiverse's premier adventurers for hire.

Omin Dran, CEO of Acquisitions Incorporated and war priest of Tymora, is the very model of the modern Faerûn business mien. He prioritizes his responsibilities first to his shareholders (which is to say, himself); second to his goddess; and then at some later stage to the well-being of his employees. It's definitely not third. But it's up there somewhere.

Jim Darkmagic III comes from a long line of renowned wizards, but he turned his back on his family and his inheritance for a life on the stage—at least until well-paid heroics came calling. Jim and Omin's unlikely partner-

ship began when Jim was the only surviving candidate in the running for a hotly contested position with the company. (Any deaths incurred in this process were incidental, and not the result of the actions or negligence of Acq Inc.)

> What the customer wants is not always what the customer needs … or gets.
>
> —Jim Darkmagic

How It Started

Acquisitions Incorporated began as most adventuring groups do, with the wholesale removal of irksome kobolds, scouting ruined towers, delving into dwarven necropolis-cities, and abandoning wounded goblin hirelings named Splug to a terrible fate. The usual stuff. But in short order, Acq Inc traded kobolds for dragons, and upgraded ruined towers to eldritch temples. As the company grew, so too did its demand for willing and able-bodied adventurers. However, a limited payroll meant having to settle for one or the other.

After coming to the conclusion that a mission statement best described as "minion harvesting" sent the wrong message, Acquisitions Incorporated started an internship program. In accordance with the truism "you get what you pay for," the very first Acq Inc intern died on his second assignment with the company. But like all good leaders, Omin Dran understood that truisms cut two ways, and he led the remaining team on a legendary trek through the Nine Hells to recover the soul of said intern. (Clearly, none of those hells paid for him either.)

The rogue Viari is one of Acquisitions Incorporated's best internship success stories. In fact, he was so successful that he remained the company's flagship intern for nearly a decade. He first joined Acquisitions Incorporated during an expedition into the Undermountain dungeons of Halaster Blackcloak (who, due to an ongoing defamation suit, we can no longer refer to as "the Mad Mage"). From regrowing his own arm after an unfortunate incident with the *Apocalypse Dagger*, to wrangling dinosaurs to win street races, Viari has earned something far more valuable than a regular salary with Acq Inc. He's earned on-the-job experience.

Aggressive Expansion

Thanks to the company's continuing success and robust internship program, Acquisitions Incorporated has long since outgrown garden-variety slaughter and disregard for public well-being. Môrgæn, an elf ranger from the Elsewynn, joined the team as a troubleshooter some time ago, and quickly showed that her propensity for slaughter and disregard for the public well-being is far beyond garden variety.

Môrgæn's recruitment coincided with Acquisitions Incorporated acquiring its first airship. Diviners have theorized that this was no coincidence, but the combined psychic will of all mortal creatures to put as much distance between them and the ranger as possible. More practical minds see the folly in this, since the airship simply gave Môrgæn a better vantage point.

Beyond the core Acquisitions Incorporated crew, Omin Dran has overseen regular strategic expansion of the Acq Inc brand. The "C" Team, the "B" team, and numerous other franchise operations have been established, flying the Acq Inc flag, bearing the Acq Inc sigil, and—most crucially—paying a cut of the profits into company coffers on a monthly basis.

The Adventuring Biz

In the years between its founding and today, Acquisitions Incorporated has pried deep into the underbelly of Waterdeep, commandeered battle balloons above the jungles of Chult, faced down mechanical beholders, and robbed a bank operated by devils. The team has also rubbed shoulders with some of the most notorious figures in the Forgotten Realms, including bumping into Drizzt Do'Urden while journeying through the Underdark.

When Jim Darkmagic became afflicted with the Death Curse, there was no definitive proof that this was a direct result of his employment with Acquisitions Incorporated, or had been incurred while on assignment. However, as Omin had already made his stance on the subject of death and termination of employment contracts very clear, he sought to break the curse. Dabbling in some light cloning and contracting the help of a trash witch, the team managed to restore Jim to peak productivity. Never one to waste company resources, Omin also traded Jim's clone to a devil. It seemed prudent at the time.

However, nothing in Acquisitions Incorporated's storied history encapsulates the company's efficacy better than the recovery of Omin's sister, Auspicia Dran, from the Wandering Crypt. The specifics of her initial capture by that dread creature remain shrouded in mystery. Some say it was inspired by the evil actions of Omin's other sister, Portentia. Some also speculate that as the sole shareholder of Acq Inc, Omin founded the company for the express purpose of rescuing his beloved sister. Acquisitions Incorporated will not be making further statements on the matter at this time.

No Competition

The company's mounting successes have led, of course, to imitators and rivals. The Six, counting among their number a certain left-for-dead goblin now named Splugoth the Returned, have been a persistent splinter in the Acq Inc corporate paw for ages. Suggesting that acquisition is a family business, Omin's own sister Portentia now runs and serves a competing company called Dran Enterprises. Originally founded by what turned out to be a false version of Omin's lost sister, Auspicia, Dran Enterprises has long sought to execute a hostile takeover of Acquisitions Incorporated. All such efforts have been skillfully rebuffed, of course, with Acq Inc embracing its place as an always-independent (and clearly superior) operation.

Riding its past success into a completely deliberate and planned expansion across the multiverse, Acquisitions Incorporated shows no signs of slowing down. (Because that would likely require self-reflection and

measured responses that are historically off-brand.) And that expansion means new franchises. The first step was Ravnica, a city run by guilds and simply overflowing at the practicability of acquisition for hire. But beyond that? Infinite possibilities. Because wherever people want things they don't currently have, Acquisitions Incorporated will be there, asking them to sign.

Fast Franchise Generator

No time to read the whole book? Who can blame you! (What is this thing, like 200 pages? Yikes.) To get a taste of the awesomeness that is an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise, just roll up any number of critical franchise elements from the tables on this page. (DMs can also do this if they want to shirk the work of creating rival franchises from whole cloth. Slackers.)

Franchise Logos or Livery

d10	Logo or Livery
1	The words "Green Flan" in Elvish
2	The symbol of Asmodeus
3	The name of the franchise's dead founder, elaborately engraved
4	A beholder's central eye
5	The silhouette of a catoblepas
6	Three werewolves howling at the moon
7	"Lathander is Our Copilot"
8	A winking Jim Darkmagic
9	A snaking piece of barbed wire
10	The franchise's business number

Headquarters Locations

d10	Headquarters
1	A tavern once owned by smugglers. Tunnel entrances have clearly been bricked over, and no one's quite sure where they all lead.
2	A simple chapel to a long-forgotten god. The pews are awfully uncomfortable, but fragrant incense burns without ceasing.
3	A battle-worn castle. A real fixer-upper, it's seen better days. Better years. Maybe even better centuries.
4	A top-of-the-line naval vessel that has somehow been stranded miles inland.
5	A private library. The franchise is free to use the space as long as no harm comes to the books.
6	A hollowed-out statue of an ancient king.
7	An early model airship. Very early. The balloon is mostly patches at this point—a motley assortment of ship sails, cloaks, and animal skins.
8	A former blacksmith's shop, which was a former exercise studio, and a former cafe before that.
9	A multicolor waterproof canvas stretched over a succession of jutting stone columns. Within, it always appears to be late spring.
10	A creaking wagon that smells of turnips, and which is bigger inside than out.

Headquarters Quirks

d8	Quirk
1	One staircase leads to two different places somehow.
2	Any kettle used in the kitchen screams when it boils.
3	Every chair has one leg slightly shorter than the others.
4	Every stairwell has an illusion of one additional step at the top.
5	There's a nest in the attic. A big nest. Like, really big.
6	Every Friday, the color of the walls changes to a different festive theme.
7	The building was previously owned by a franchise rival, and the place is filled with their marketing materials.
8	There's a space inside the headquarters that's clearly a room, but which has no doors.

Memorable Majordomos

d6	Majordomo
1	A consummate professional. No amount of blood, gore, or viscera will keep them from completing their duties.
2	A sinister figure who sticks to the shadows and respond always to requests with, "Yes, master."
3	The ghost of the previous owner. They do a terrible job and refer to all prospective clients as trespassers.
4	A brusque, deaf, retired military captain.
5	An incredibly cheerful chef, who insists that no business is more pressing than a full belly.
6	A druid that keeps an open door policy for any and all animals seeking shelter. Their cleaning policy is less rigorous.

Reliable Connections

d8	Connection
1	**Kim the Kid:** The best fence in town.
2	**Jeremy Snoot:** The most easily intimidated customs official in the city. From blueprints of government buildings to shipping manifests, he's your halfling.
3	**York Battleby:** A dab hand at knitting and swinging a sword. He takes payment in liquor for either service.
4	**Diana Fenwick:** Noble who wants to play criminal; enthusiastic, inexperienced, and loaded.
5	**"G":** The only thing known about this information broker is the dead-drop point where they exchange messages, and that they're never wrong.
6	**Teresa Clearlake:** If you're looking for a place to lie low, her funeral home is ideal.
7	**Jenkin Twotooth:** Always has a job for those looking to scrape together a few coins. Unfortunately, his teeth outnumber his scruples.
8	**"Mustard" Micah:** Famous for being able to get goods and people past any blockade. Provided you don't mind said goods or people smelling strongly of mustard for the next month.

Chapter 2: Growing Your Franchise

As a run-of-the-dungeon adventurer, your character might kick through countless locked doors, lay down ancient magics, or send any number of monsters to the afterlife in the pursuit of fame and treasure. But when you take your place as part of an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise, you become something more than a mere hero. As a member of an elite group standing on the cutting edge of the adventuring business, the brand precedes you. And sure, sometimes the blades on the cutting edge are kind of sharp. But with Head Office at your back, you know you have the best tools in the industry at your disposal. And maybe the basic funeral packages Acq Inc offers aren't that great, but there are some tasteful upgrades you might consider.

This chapter introduces the Acquisitions Incorporated franchise and the rules for running it. Franchise benefits are organized by level tier, and include an ever-expanding business territory, wide ranges of options and upgrades for a franchise headquarters, and more. This chapter also introduces company positions—a new set of rules for franchise characters granting access to unique, tier-based abilities that can help a party stand out in a crowded marketplace. And because taking a vacation is no excuse for diminished returns, an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise can make use of expanded rules for downtime and franchise activities, allowing players to help shape the business and the narrative of the campaign even when they aren't in the field.

Franchise Advancement

A license to operate an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise comes with nearly limitless benefits! When your party starts a franchise, you receive a region in which to operate, a franchise headquarters, and a majordomo to assist with basic headquarters needs. As your characters become accomplished adventurers (and continue to contribute to Head Office coffers), Acquisitions Incorporated helps your franchise gain even greater benefits! See the following Franchise Advancement table for a summary of what you get at each rank.

Franchise Rank

By default, a franchise rank is gained at each tier of play (beginning at level 1 and advancing when the average party level reaches level 5, 11, and 17). The DM might choose to increase or decrease the level of play at which franchise tiers are gained, or tie advancement to story or campaign goals. Each franchise rank provides characters the opportunity to operate in a larger geographic area, hire staff and direct them to execute franchise tasks, and customize the franchise headquarters.

Licensed Region

When a franchise first starts out, it is licensed to operate in a small region focused on a settlement or similar mercantile point. You might think this means Head Office doesn't trust its new franchisees. Not at all! No! It's just so much easier to support a group when they start in a

focused area. Don't worry at all that a rival Acquisitions Incorporated franchise will outmaneuver you. It seldom happens. Keep growing your business, and the Acq Inc license will expand to help you find more customers and increase your brand presence.

Within your licensed region, you have the right to use the full power of Acquisitions Incorporated branding. No other Acquisitions Incorporated franchise will operate in your region, and all the region's customers are exclusively yours. Of course, non-Acquisitions Incorporated rival organizations might be present. You are expected to drive them out of business. (Or give them untimely deaths. You do you.) A franchise can build or operate any number of locations, such as warehouses and trade shops, within its region. You may not maintain property or establish formal operations in a settlement outside your region, even if you ship goods to that location.

You may not use the Acquisitions Incorporated brand outside your licensed region without written, documancer-generated permission, since those areas might belong to other licensees. You can adventure outside your territory, of course, and can assist or work for other organizations. However, you are expected to prioritize missions given to you by Head Office.

Rank 1: Settlement

Acquisitions Incorporated grants your franchise a license to operate in a settlement, and in a territory around the settlement approximately 10 miles across. If your region includes a coastline, you are granted the rights to engage in sea trade within that region. You can ship goods (over land, water, or air) to one city or other settlement outside your region. (The DM approves this location, and might wish to establish your franchise's relationship with it through play as part of the campaign.)

Rank 2: Small Territory

Your license now expands to include a region similar in size to a province or a small kingdom—typically up to 50 miles across, with your starting settlement somewhere within. (For mapping purposes, this area is roughly the same scale as a province-scale map. See "Mapping Your Campaign" in chapter 1 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.) You are expected to expand your trade and branding throughout the region. You'll seize new markets, develop new offerings, increase your network of contacts, and safeguard the king and queen's spoiled kids so the monarchs think of you positively. You can ship goods to two cities or other settlements outside your region.

Group Dynamic

An Acquisitions Incorporated franchise is a group effort. Many decisions must be made in the course of running a franchise and playing in an Acq Inc campaign, and it is assumed that all players will be involved in making those decisions. Whenever this book talks about a franchise collectively—and in particular, when it talks about decisions being made by a franchise—the understanding is that all characters (in the game) and all players (at the table) have an equal say in determining a franchise's fortunes and fate. Sure, arguments will crop up from time to time. But that kind of roleplaying is a big part of what makes an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign.

Rank 3: Large Territory

Your license grows to include a broad expanse of provinces, a few small kingdoms, or a large kingdom or federation, covering a territory the size of half the Sword Coast in the Forgotten Realms campaign setting. A large territory might overlap with other Acquisitions Incorporated regions, though you are theoretically working with (and perhaps overseeing) smaller franchises rather than working against them. You can ship your goods to any destination, and can assign staff to a city to which you ship goods—solely to oversee the distribution of those goods, and certainly not to compete with rivals. Don't cause too much trouble and Head Office will stay happy.

Rank 4: Limited Extraplanar

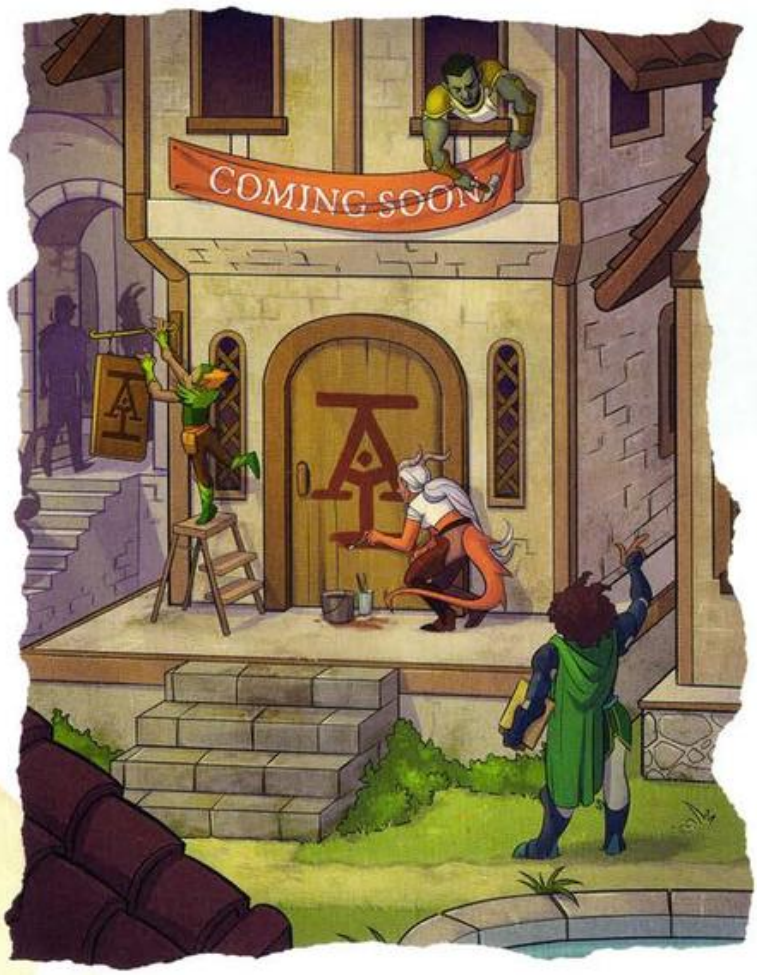
Your franchise now includes specific locations located on other planes of existence. These could include such fabled trading locations as Sigil, the City of Brass on the Elemental Plane of Fire, or a githyanki outpost in the Astral Plane. Your license to operate in these regions is not exclusive. Your region on the Material Plane might or might not expand, depending on both your performance and the goals of the campaign. The DM might establish extraplanar locations through play. Failing—or succeeding—in securing an extraplanar location could create interesting and deadly rivalries!

Staff

Chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook* details the costs for characters to hire skilled and untrained hirelings. As is true of characters in any campaign, Acquisitions Incorporated franchisees are free to hire any NPCs they want, within whatever limitations the DM wants to set on such employment. But the franchise itself comes

Franchise Advancement

Levels	Franchise Rank	Licensed Region	New Staff	Franchise Tasks	Headquarters Features	Costs
1–4	1	Settlement	Majordomo, 2 untrained hirelings, 1 skilled hireling	1 task	Starter headquarters	× 1
5–10	2	Small territory	4 untrained hirelings, 1 skilled hireling, 10 crew	2 tasks	Cosmetic, expansion, transportation, weapon	× 1.5
11–16	3	Large territory	8 untrained hirelings, 2 skilled hirelings, 10 crew	3 tasks	Arcane, defensive, franchise choice	× 3
17–20	4	Limited extraplanar	16 untrained hirelings, 4 skilled hirelings, 20 crew	4 tasks	Arcane, franchise choice, secret	× 5



with a number of staff whose wages are part of the franchise's cost, providing not only labor but story potential.

Each franchise rank grants a number of new staff members who live in the franchise headquarters or within its geographic scope. The cost of maintaining staff is included in a franchise's costs. Each staff member has a proficiency bonus equal to 2 + the franchise's rank. For skilled hirelings or crew, the DM might substitute NPC statistics when that seems appropriate. Each time a franchise gains a rank, existing staff members can be gifted with early retirement (that is, fired), and replaced alongside new hires that fit the franchise's needs.

A franchise might engage all kinds of hirelings and agents over the course of a campaign, but specialized franchise staff fall into four different categories.

Majordomo

A majordomo administers a franchise headquarters. They typically reside within the headquarters and seldom leave it, sending out communications through a dedicated messenger (at no extra cost, and traveling on foot or by means the franchise provides). A majordomo is proficient in Charisma (Persuasion) and two skills of the DM's choice.

The DM is encouraged to use the rules for creating nonplayer characters in chapter 4 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to detail the majordomo, giving this individual a vibrant personality and backstory. The majordomo's goals should be aligned with the franchise and with Acquisitions Incorporated as a whole, allowing them to properly act as an ally and steward for the party.

It can be helpful to a campaign to provide the majordomo with a backstory that complements a franchise's evolution over time. A sage might research how the franchise gains new capabilities. Or perhaps the majordomo was the pilot of a vessel capable of planar travel, who slowly applies those features to the headquarters. A majordomo of a franchise modeling itself after a spy organization might constantly invent devices for the franchise, making continuing progress as the party returns with gold, lore, and resources.

> An employee is like a friend you pay.
>
> —Omin Dran

Untrained Hirelings

As described in the "Services" section in chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*, untrained hirelings provide general labor, and can function as builders, cleaners, porters, and other workers. Untrained hirelings can work for a franchise or its allies, perhaps tending a garden for a noble family or helping a merchant unload cargo from ships. They will not engage in combat and do not leave the headquarters to join the party on adventures.

The DM should name at least one hireling who acts as a leader for any interactions with groups of untrained laborers. Providing hirelings with a similar background (such as a band of ex-soldiers or reformed criminals) can add personality to the group. Consider using the rules in chapter 4 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, applying the results of a single set of rolls to the entire group. Those hirelings could all shave their heads zealously, be brawny but absentminded, play various musical instruments, use colorful oaths and exclamations, and so on.

Group ideals, bonds, and flaws, along with a shared history, can all add depth to a group of untrained hirelings. Those musicians might be connected by the ideal of tradition, and bound to the franchise to protect a cultural heirloom they value above all else. Their flaw and secret could be that they stole the heirloom from their former employer, a rival merchant organization. Over time, the same hirelings might show up as part of the characters' adventures time and time again, revealing aspects of their past and creating story continuity.

Filling Positions

A franchise's majordomo can take a company position (see the next section) in addition to the positions taken by the characters. Especially with a small party, it can be good to have a majordomo fill a useful position that no character wants to take. No other NPCs can take company positions.

Job Title and Benefits

What the *Player's Handbook* calls untrained hirelings are often referred to as "subemployees" within an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise, while skilled hirelings typically gain the more prestigious title of "intern." It's entirely up to individual franchisees what awesome titles they bestow upon their staff members in addition to (or, indeed, in lieu of) perks such as an occasional wage.

Hirelings are kindling in the fire of opportunity!
—Jim Darkmagic

Happy Franchise Staff

Skilled Hirelings

A skilled hireling has one or more skill, weapon, or tool proficiencies. A franchise can request skilled hirelings when needed (up to the maximum allowed by franchise rank), with the players describing the concept behind the hirelings and selecting one proficiency for each. The DM can then customize the hirelings as desired, perhaps by adding additional proficiencies or adjusting their combat statistics.

Skilled hirelings can be fired and hired as needed. A franchise might bring on a couple of thugs to act as distraction during a street fair, then release those NPCs to hire a different set of skilled hirelings to conduct franchise tasks and downtime activities.

Hirelings cannot perform more than one task at a time. A full complement of skilled hirelings assisting the party on a mission precludes other skilled hirelings from helping with franchise tasks and downtime activities until the mission is completed. As with untrained hirelings, detailing a group background and assigning personality characteristics to a group leader can make for a fun play experience.

Adventuring. Characters can adventure with up to one skilled hireling at a time. An NPC with a challenge rating of roughly half the franchise rank works well for most adventures, providing utility without disrupting balance. The loyalty system described in chapter 4 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* can be used to determine whether the hireling remains dedicated to the party's goals, or the DM can make that decision on the basis of how the adventure plays out and the characters' attitude toward the adventuring NPC.

Tasks and Downtime. Skilled hirelings can also be assigned to franchise tasks, as described in the "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" section later in this chapter.

Crew

Crew are skilled hirelings trained in tasks pertaining to the physical maintenance of a franchise (for example, servers or gardeners) or the navigation of a mobile headquarters (sailors for a seagoing franchise, engineers for a giant hollow statue, and so on). Crew do not leave a franchise and cannot perform franchise tasks. They typically run rather than fight back when attacked, though the DM can decide otherwise. If a mobile franchise headquarters requires more crew than is granted by the franchise's rank, the characters must hire the remainder (typically at the skilled hireling cost of 2 gp per day).

Hiring crew can become a cooperative roleplaying activity. Potential crew might hear of Acquisitions Incorporated or the party's exploits and come to interview with the franchisees. Choices might be offered by the DM, as between a team of ex-militia who lost their last battle and a crew of recently released criminals who swear they were wrongly imprisoned. Names, personalities, and roles can be assigned to crew by the DM and the players. Rather than simply interacting with the cook and the first mate, the characters can instead deal with Pepper, the chef who loves spicy foods, and Brazen, the veteran sailor who always talks back, creating the potential for entertaining interactions as the franchise grows.

Headquarters Features

Acquisitions Incorporated Head Office provides the members of each franchise with a place to call their own. It might not be initially impressive (cleaning any old blood stains is the franchisees' responsibility). But over time, characters in an Acq Inc campaign are granted resources to help construct the headquarters of their dreams! Each franchise rank affords the characters a number of choices, allowing customization and creativity. Sample features are provided as guidelines, but a franchise's features can include literally anything decided on and agreed to by the players and the DM.

Group Design

When selecting a feature, the characters must make decisions together—meaning the players must do the same. Deciding on the features of a headquarters should be a team effort, both in game and around the table. What should a headquarters look like initially? Do the characters prefer to travel by land or by sea, or

There are a lot of perks to being an intern that people overlook. The hours are very flexible, you get a 20 percent discount in the gift shop, you get a bathroom break every four hours as long as you ask your supervisor first. And sometimes if you go into the conference room after a meeting, there will be a bunch of soda and leftover subs. You can just take as much as you want! As long as nobody sees you.
—Viari

to operate from a fixed location? Is a ruined keep more interesting than an old vine-covered wizard's tower in the woods? Is the headquarters remote or within a settlement—perhaps an old tavern or caravansary the characters can restore?

It can be helpful to think ahead as well. Acquisitions Incorporated is known for mobile franchises, helping to bring goods and adventuring services to distant locations. When a franchise headquarters becomes mobile, will it fly or sail? Will it gain the power to teleport across the land? Will it sprout legs and walk?

Everything depends on the type of headquarters. The top of a wizard's tower might detach and shoot skyward like a missile. Or a franchise's headquarters might be contained within a giant statue, which over time gains the power to move farther and faster. A castle or other stationary structure could contain a portal or teleportation circle, allowing the characters to travel to distant locations while the stronghold remains behind.

Incorporating Benefits

The characters' collective skill proficiencies, tool proficiencies, backgrounds, and positions within their franchise could all impact the design and construction of a headquarters. A glassblower might make beautiful stained-glass windows, while a herbalist fills the headquarters with pleasing or mysterious scents. An acolyte could outfit a small area of the headquarters as a chapel, while a sage sources a unique desk at which to work. Such features are cosmetic or limited in impact, but enable players to feel more interested and invested in their headquarters.

Starter Headquarters

Each franchise's starter headquarters is a mundane site, which has often been selected or handed down by Acquisitions Incorporated. The characters' initial base of operations could be a ruined tower, a worn horse-drawn carriage, a beat-up fishing boat, a dilapidated store or farm, or any similar structure or site. The DM might direct the characters toward a single ideal location, or might provide a range of options for players and characters to choose from. And of course, many potential franchise locations will have an interesting past—a haunted mansion, a mysterious lighthouse, an old wizard's tower filled with malfunctioning magic, and so forth.

The DM approves the headquarters concept and decides how large or small the initial structure can be, as well as any useful features. DMs and players can work together to create a map of the headquarters and its surroundings. Chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* can help detail both wilderness and urban locations.

Lifestyle Expenses

Whenever characters are in residence at their franchise headquarters, they can automatically benefit from a minimum lifestyle—poor at rank 1, modest at rank 2, comfortable at rank 3, and wealthy at rank 4. The normal costs associated with that lifestyle for franchisees and select staff are subsumed within the overall cost of running the franchise. Outside the franchise headquarters, normal lifestyle expenses apply.

> I don't have rivals. I have partners who simply don't know it yet.
>
> —Omin Dran

Many franchisees will use their starter headquarters as a point for expansion, adding new features, new rooms, new levels—and, of course, new magic as the franchise grows in rank. Other campaigns might be better served by having the franchise change headquarters at different stages. Characters might start out in a ship, then move to a castle, then take possession of a unique magical headquarters in the end. Any potential headquarters site might be discovered by the characters as part of the campaign, or sites might be suggested or allocated by Head Office.

Any of the following suggestions can make a great starter headquarters, or can provide inspiration for other headquarters features.

Abandoned Lighthouse. Raided by orcs who left no one alive? Those are probably just stories. And even if true, the orcs won't come back (probably). This abandoned lighthouse headquarters is strong enough to stand against any storm (probably), and many of the leaks have been fixed already. And just look at that cool light up top, and the oversized storage cellar. Docks close by are perfect for a starter franchise that comes into possession of a boat, and are also a sign of the lighthouse's importance to coastal trade. Commandeering it will likely win over the locals and maybe even the region's royalty!

Beat-Up Keelboat. Any franchise can take to the seas in this new (okay, very used) keelboat! Pirates killed the previous owners, and Head Office picked it up for an excellent price. Most of the holes in the hull are repaired, and the sails are only a little bit moldy. Even better, there's a small covered area in the rear protected from the elements that makes a perfect living space! The keelboat holds a half-ton of cargo, and might even come with reduced docking fees at some ports of call.

Statistics for a standard keelboat are found in chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The DM might adjust the number of people the boat can comfortably carry, but having such a headquarters typically implies that most franchise staff are itinerant or live elsewhere in whatever settlement is the boat's primary port of call.

Old Tavern. With just a little work and some better furniture, this place could be the talk of the town. The tavern is certainly not haunted. Seriously, no one listens to those rumors. But if it were, and if the story was spun the right way, the marketing potential could be huge. Some even say that the ghosts (which totally don't exist) like to sing, so that's a plus! The kitchen is already stocked with plates, mugs, and lots of knives, and a few rooms upstairs are ready to rent out to travelers.

Worn Carriage and Horses. This humble, worn carriage, previously owned by a now-defunct trading company, makes a perfect starter headquarters. The carriage's exterior is weathered wood, and the interior seats and cushions have seen better days. Still, it offers all the perks of home plus the ability to change the neighbors every time you take to the road.

The rear of the carriage features a generous cargo space for up to 500 pounds of goods, and is protected

The "C" Team's Wagon Headquarters

from the weather. The horses are hardworking and love apples. The carriage has AC 11 and 75 hit points, and moves at the speed of its draft horses (40 feet). Four passengers can ride inside, two up front with one steering, and two atop the rear cargo area. Up to three people can also sit on the roof of the cabin, for an especially exciting perch when the cart is moving quickly!

Because this sort of franchise typically can't hold the characters and all their staff (at least not comfortably), such staff are often itinerant or based in whatever settlement the carriage returns to most often.

Cosmetic Features

A cosmetic improvement, gained at franchise rank 2, allows a franchise to radically alter the look and feel of its headquarters. A beat-up wagon could become a gilded carriage, with luxurious interiors and servants dressed in matching finery. A tavern could proudly display the party's kills in the drinking hall, feature mugs gathered from dwarven holds around Faerûn, and have decor matching a particular theme.

Improvements can also be of a fantastic or magical nature, such as flickering magical torches or portraits that watch and interact with observers. The DM has final approval over such improvements, and is the arbiter as to whether cosmetic improvements might provide any actual benefits during play. When allowed, such benefits should be situational and limited. A foe might become distracted the first time a ghostly figure appears in a haunted tavern, but the quality of the illusion is such that it doesn't stand up to continued scrutiny.

Cosmetic effects can also be focused on selling and branding a franchise, such as adding manufacturing capabilities, a light-up sign, a customer showroom or service center, and other commercial features. At the DM's discretion, such features might generate additional income or lower the costs of certain franchise tasks.

Draconic Ship. This once-innocuous seagoing vessel has been detailed to appear as a brass dragon. The ship's interior is decorated in draconic art, and platforms among the rigging are linked by silk ropes attached to pulleys. These might provide benefits to crew trained in their use if the ship is ever attacked.

Enchanted Wizard's Tower. In the entrance hall of a former-wizard's-tower headquarters, enchanted portraits display visages of the franchise's recently vanquished foes. Smaller portraits throughout the tower display important moments in the franchise's adventuring history, and the whole interior is set with magical lighting, decorated with candelabra, and features drapes and carpets matching the franchise's chosen motif.

Expansion Features

At rank 2, an expansion feature allows a franchise to double the size of its headquarters. When doing so, players and characters can define the changes to the current configuration. Perhaps the headquarters expands in size laterally, or gains an extra floor. Perhaps a new basement is excavated—or poking around the existing

basement reveals a secret level of dungeons heretofore unknown.

Franchise members can decide on what features are involved in the expansion, including new windows, doors, and furniture. Adding certain types of space might also call for extra supporting features. If storage is on an upper floor, a winch might be installed to lift goods. A cellar could add another exit and an area for storing wine or alchemical supplies. Or a carriage headquarters could gain a second cart to become a wagon train.

All construction is low cost but functional, as in the following examples.

Expanded Lighthouse. The lighthouse is now taller, with two additional levels, an upgraded beacon, and a stronger exterior. A stairway leads down into a network of old caverns, including some used as storage space, and finally onto a small beach with a dock.

Expanded Tavern. The building adjacent to the tavern has been bought out and connected to it, allowing for more guest chambers, a larger common room, a larger kitchen, and staff quarters. A large fireplace fills the common room with light and warmth, while new tables and chairs create a welcome environment. Guest chambers might feature a patio or balcony.

Transportation Features

Also at rank 2, every franchise gains some form of mobility, with players and DM working together to determine how a headquarters facilitates travel (or expands on its normal travel modes) from one location to another. A ship might gain a magic sail, or could add a balloon to become a battle balloon airship. A hollow statue could gain the ability to stride across the landscape. A wizard's tower might teleport from place to place. Or doors within a tavern could be revealed as a magical portal connected to various locations in far-flung lands.

The DM has final approval over the method of locomotion, and can put in place any reasonable limitations or constraints on that movement. Additionally, any method of movement should have a weakness or drawback determined by the DM. As a rule of thumb, a mobile headquarters can travel a distance of 30 miles per day (equivalent to a fast travel pace) per franchise rank. This rate of travel can vary depending on weather, visibility, availability of maps, or other conditions.

Giant Stone Statue. A 100-foot-tall stone statue has stairs and rooms carved within its interior. When a character sits at the helm located in a room within the statue's head, the statue can be directed to walk across the land. The statue ignores difficult terrain, usually by simply crashing through it. However, the navigator has a limited sight line while peering out through the statue's large eyes. When the terrain is cluttered or subject to combat conditions, it can be hard to avoid creatures or objects smaller than a large building.

Battle Balloon. A hot air balloon is lit by a magic furnace channeling elemental power. A galleon suspended below the balloon features a helm that controls the ship. The vessel can fly virtually anywhere, ignoring difficult terrain, but it is at risk from storms and strong winds. If the balloon takes significant damage, the ship could be forced to descend—or might even crash.

(Appendix C features vehicle statistics for a typical battle balloon. For characters who choose this highly coveted feature for their headquarters, the DM can impose limitations on the ship's attacks and make changes to its statistics.)

Self-Contained Train. This mobile franchise headquarters features a magical-mechanical locomotive that lays down its own track. Mechanical arms at the front of the locomotive set down crossbars and rails in front of the headquarters at ridiculous speed, while arms at the back of the headquarters pick up the track as it passes. The train moves at quarter speed over difficult terrain (instead of half speed). It can pass over rivers, but cannot cross lakes or large bodies of water.

Extradimensional Wagon. A seemingly simple wagon drawn by an old horse channels powerful magic. The wagon's driver can cause the wagon to teleport the distance of a day's journey, targeting a known location over the course of one or more extradimensional jumps. Such teleportation is usually done when no one

Acquisitions Incorporated is Magic!

Dungeons & Dragons offers a wide range of play styles, and works with many different types of campaign story. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* talks about some of the most common types of fantasy that can shape a D&D campaign, including a general sense of campaigns being high magic, low magic, or the D&D standard in between.

An Acquisitions Incorporated campaign has its own distinct feel, as talked about in chapter 1 of this book. Part of that feel comes from the substantial benefits that characters gain from franchise features and company positions—mechanical boons, magic items, access to powerful spell effects, and more. These benefits are gained automatically, as a general reward for the characters' adventuring success driving franchise advancement. So it's important that everyone is aware how adding those built-in campaign benefits to the regular magic gained during adventuring will give the characters a boost in power.

For an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign meant to feel and play like standard D&D, the DM should consider creating a low-magic campaign, and letting the benefits of company positions and franchise features fill in the magical gaps. A standard campaign played with the rules in this book should be treated as a high magic campaign, with the DM and the players understanding that the difficulty of encounters and other tasks might need to be ramped up to offer a real challenge to the characters. Of course, nothing prevents anyone from playing a high magic campaign with the Acquisitions Incorporated rules. But DMs and players should all be aware that doing so will create extremely powerful characters—who will no doubt attract extremely powerful enemies and threats as a matter of course.

A good idea is to swim in the wake of an existing business. Somebody else did the market research and decided this was a good location? Awesome! Now use that decision against them. Set up direct competition. Then spread rumors about them until they're forced to leave the area in shame. Now the market is yours. That's how you business.

—Donaar Blit'zen

is looking, to avoid arousing suspicion or frightening the locals. Though the wagon eventually arrives at the intended destination, the intervening stop-off points are unknown—and quite possibly perilous.

Weapon Features

At rank 2, the members of a franchise can add a weapon to their headquarters, choosing from the options in the "Siege Equipment" section of chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The DM can limit those options or change the details of specific choices, and players can also design unique offensive features, subject to approval by the DM. For example, a walking statue that strikes with a fist could be treated as a ram—or the DM and the players might agree that it would be fun to use some of the effects of *Bigby's hand* for such an attack.

Most siege weapons (whether mechanical or magical) require two characters, crew, or skilled hirelings to operate, and such weapons might be slow to reload or recharge. Headquarters weapons are not particularly effective against small bands of creatures (such as a group of goblins), but they can be useful against a single large threat (such as a dragon). If siege weapons are abused by franchisees, they might be targeted by enemies, break down, or require costly maintenance each time they are employed in battle.

Giant Statue's Fists. A giant hollow metal statue acting as a franchise headquarters features a control center from which the statue's arms can be manipulated. One fist can be used per round to strike at foes, using statistics similar to a ram (AC 15, 100 hit points, immunity to poison and psychic damage).

Giant Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 15 ft., one object or creature. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) bludgeoning damage.

Lighthouse Energy Blast. Magical power can be focused through a lighthouse beacon, requiring 1 round to gather energy and aim. The following round, the energy can be released. The beacon has AC 12, 75 hit points, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and vulnerability to cold. The explosion of energy can be treated as a *scorching ray*, *fireball*, or *lightning bolt* spell, as the DM determines. More powerful features might require more time to recharge, or could be usable only a certain number of times per day. Such attacks might function at longer range but be unable to target creatures or objects within 60 feet of the lighthouse.

Arcane Features

At rank 3, an arcane feature provides a unique magical capability to a headquarters. A haunted headquarters might gain a permanent cohort of friendly undead servants, while a giant statue headquarters could gain the ability to allow the characters to see at great distances and through darkness or fog. A more generic arcane feature could instead grant any franchisee the ability to cast a specific spell of 6th level or lower, with a limitation of one casting per day.

An arcane feature should be something that doesn't fit within another category (specifically, a transportation or weapon feature), though the DM is the final judge of what arcane features are acceptable.

> Money is an attempt to discretize the ephemeral—an impossible task. When Head Office comes knocking, tell them that money is an attempt to discretize the ephemeral.
>
> —K'thriss Drow'b

Ever-Changing Ship. Whether an oceangoing vessel or an airship, this headquarters can alter its appearance with illusion magic. Additionally, the appearance of some or all creatures aboard can be changed as if they were affected by a *seeming* spell. Franchisees can alter the appearance of the ship and its occupants a number of times per day, or can drop the illusory effects as needs be. The nature of the illusion magic means that the ship's size and features do not change, and individuals interacting with the ship or investigating its appearance have a chance to see the true form of the ship and its crew.

Spectral Wait Staff. A tavern headquarters (which already has a cosmetic feature to make it appear haunted) now gains spectral wait staff. The spectral staff serve customers expertly, and speak and understand speech as if intelligent. However, they are magical creations similar to those conjured by the *unseen servant* spell, able to perform all the functions of such a creation and any other functions agreed to by the DM. Spectral staff can momentarily become insubstantial, along with anything they carry, allowing them to serve food and drink through walls. Any member of the franchise can spend an action to telepathically command one or more spectral staff members.

Defensive Features

Also at rank 3, the headquarters gains one defensive feature, planned out by the players in collaboration with the DM. Ships and other vessels with statistics can gain an increase to hit points or AC. Or a general defensive feature could include the choice of any two effects noted in the *guards and wards* spell, which can be enabled or disabled by any franchise member.

Players are encouraged to be creative in thinking about defensive features. An airship might have a deck that can channel lightning to repel boarders. A wagon might have transparent windows as strong as steel, and the ability to retract any rails or platforms upon which attacking foes could stand. Defensive features might impose conditions on enemies, or even deal damage. The DM should limit damaging effects to dealing 10 damage to a single target (5 damage for a multitarget or area effect) per franchise rank. When a saving throw is required, a good DC is 12 + franchise rank.

Carriage Ejector Platforms. A carriage gains potent defensive capabilities in the form of sections of its roof and walls set with powerful concealed springs. This defensive feature can be activated as a bonus action by the driver or any creature within 5 feet of them. When a creature steps or grabs onto a protected section, that creature must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or be flung from the wagon to a distance of 10 feet per franchise rank. The creature takes falling damage as if it had fallen that distance.

Electrified Floors and Rails. Specific areas of a ship or airship's floor and railings are warded with elemental lightning, up to an area the size of half the ship's upper deck. A character at the helm can activate this magic as a bonus action. Any creature making contact with a warded area takes 13 (3d8) lightning damage, and must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or have its speed reduced to 0 until the start of its next turn.

Grease Compartment. Whether a building, a vessel, or some other structure, a franchise is equipped with a compartment holding grease. When activated, nozzles release the grease either in a 30-foot cone or into a specific area no larger than 20 by 20 feet—typically focusing on an area through which attacking creatures are likely to move. Any creature entering the greased area must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or fall prone and end its movement that turn. A creature driving a vehicle that enters the greased area must make an appropriate ability check against the save DC. On a failure, the vehicle veers 3d10 + 10 feet in a random direction, then ends its movement for the round.

Franchise Choice Features

At ranks 3 and 4, a franchise can outfit its headquarters with any one feature from among the lower-tier features (cosmetic, expansion, transportation, or weapon features). In consultation with the DM, this might cover additional features to augment the headquarters' existing look or combat capability, or a plan to instead make an existing feature even stronger. A method of transportation might double its speed and remove an existing drawback, or an offensive feature could deal more damage or target more than one creature per round.

Secret Features

A secret feature, gained at rank 4, is one that remains unnoticed to most inspection, typically requiring a successful DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check or Wisdom (Perception) check to notice. A headquarters might have a secret exit that guarantees escape and allows franchise members or staff to leave and enter without detection. A secret feature should usually add in-game benefits, such as a potion-brewing laboratory in a secret level of a castle, or a secret cargo hold within a ship that can keep perishables fresh and provide endless stocks of food and water to crew and passengers.

Escape Pod. A walking statue's head can also serve as an escape pod. If the headquarters is ever destroyed, or if the character controlling the statue activates the escape mode as an action, the head detaches from the body and takes to the air with a flying speed of 80 feet. The flight lasts for up to 5 rounds, and is directed by the same controls that originally controlled the statue. If the head is not on the ground when the flight ends, it falls and any creatures within take falling damage.

Extradimensional Tavern. Several of the doors in a franchise's tavern are inscribed with runes. Anyone who traces a rune while speaking a passphrase can access their choice of ten extradimensional rooms, 20 feet on a side. These rooms can function as libraries, laboratories, meeting rooms, kitchens, prisons, private quarters, and more, with each room's setup and contents chosen when the rooms are first installed. Each room's initial furnishing and equipment are included, though characters can later add to these features as they wish.

Glider Launcher. A hidden compartment within an airship holds ten gliders. A secret door leads to the compartment, which features an exterior escape hatch activated from within any glider. Each glider accommodates one Medium or smaller creature and up to 50 pounds of gear, has a flying speed of 60 feet, and must descend at least 20 feet each round. A glider can be piloted as an action by any character with proficiency with flying vehicles. Characters without such proficiency might need to make ability checks of the DM's choosing to pilot a glider successfully. A glider weighs 100 pounds, has AC 14, 50 hit points, and is immune to poison and psychic damage.

Franchise Costs

Running an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise offers countless benefits to an adventuring party—but those benefits aren't cheap. Operating the franchise, installing and maintaining franchise features, paying staff, creating merchandise with proper branding, settling legal issues, and more are all encompassed by the baseline cost for a franchise's headquarters, a multiplier from the franchise's rank, and the franchise party's business performance for the month.

If a franchise's costs leave a party low on cash, that's a sign that it's time to go adventuring. Alternatively, characters might use downtime to structure a leaner business or engage in non-adventuring activities to bring in more gold (see "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" later in this chapter for more information). A franchise's majordomo handles these finances and makes all necessary payments to Head Office, suppliers, and other agents—as long as sufficient funds are available.

Baseline Costs

The baseline monthly cost of a franchise is calculated based on the franchise's headquarters, as noted on the Baseline Costs table on the next page. The costs on this table differ from the costs found in the "Recurring Expenses" section of chapter 6 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. (That section details the costs characters might expect to pay to own an inn, a keep, or other types of properties.) This is because franchise costs include a tithe to Head Office, repayment to Acquisitions Incorporated for funding the initial construction or purchase of the headquarters, the use of approved contractors for construction and maintenance, and other subtle fees.

Baseline costs are for representative dwellings, and can be adjusted by the DM as needs be. A noble estate that is the envy of other nobles might demand expenditures of double or triple the baseline cost. A franchise's baseline costs might also change during the course of the campaign. A party might initially start out headquartered in an abandoned lighthouse with monthly expenses of 250 gp. But as time passes and headquarters features are added, that lighthouse might grow in size, weapon features, and magic to resemble a fortified tower. The DM will modify baseline costs as needed to fit the headquarters and the campaign style.

Baseline Costs

Franchise Headquarters	Monthly Cost
Horse-drawn carriage or wagon	15 gp
Farm or rural enterprise	20 gp
Settlement enterprise (guildhall, inn, tavern, shop, and so forth)	120 gp
Sailing ship, including all port fees	200 gp
Remote enterprise (fort, lighthouse, trading post, roadhouse, and so forth)	250 gp
Noble estate, large manor, fortified tower	350 gp
Airship	800 gp
Giant walking statue, magic locomotive	1,000 gp
Keep or small castle	3,000 gp
Large castle or palace	12,000 gp

Some characters might decide to maintain more than one headquarters for their franchise, or to control additional sites as part of the franchise's overall operation. A franchise might use a ship as its headquarters, while also owning a number of remote trading posts run by franchise staff. The costs for all such "virtual headquarters" should be added together to derive one monthly baseline cost.

Franchise Rank Multiplier

The multiplier on the Franchise Advancement table is applied to a franchise's baseline cost. This represents the increased costs a franchise faces as it expands into larger markets.

Monthly Business Performance

Each month, a franchise performs the running a franchise task, which can be found in the "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" section later in this chapter. The result of this task is used to calculate the final monthly cost, and is deducted from the franchise's coffers.

Defaulting

No self-respecting franchise would ever run out of money and fail to make its monthly payments. Right? Were that to happen, the amount owed—plus a modest 15 percent penalty—would be due to Head Office the following month. Failing to make payments—and especially defaulting on two or more payments in a row—is likely to trigger campaign consequences. Head Office might send inspectors to a troubled franchise, or assign the franchisees a difficult (and hopefully profitable) mission. Rival groups and entrepreneurs might smell blood and attempt to attack the franchise or take over its markets. Nefarious NPCs will most certainly come calling.

Defaulting on franchise payments can also strain relationships with nobles, merchants, and others who value a franchise more for its assets than for the characters. Such relationships typically turn frosty until the characters are able to prove that the franchise is back on its feet.

Company Positions

A franchise is a complex affair, requiring its participants to fulfill a myriad of important duties necessary for its proper growth (and the enrichment of Acquisitions Incorporated Head Office). A company position establishes a character's role within a franchise, as well as a relationship with the larger Acq Inc organization.

When you choose a company position for your character, that choice is independent of and in addition to your character's background, class, and other options. Though Head Office might tell would-be Acq Inc franchisees to play to their strengths, you should choose the position that speaks to you—and that feels like it'll be the most fun. All characters who take on an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise must take a company position. A character can take only one position within a franchise.

Each company position has its own distinct flavor—and comes with a range of preternatural benefits. Some of these benefits take the form of material boons granted by Head Office, including specialized magic items available only to Acquisitions Incorporated franchisees. Others are shaped by the subtle power of your position and the franchise's rank.

Joint Effort

Players—and especially new players—should keep in mind the amount of creativity and collaboration a company position requires when determining which position is the best fit for their character. In addition to their various mechanical benefits, the features of each company position are intended to offer players and DMs the opportunity to collaborate on crafting campaign narrative. Sometimes this is straightforward, as when a feature allows a character to learn useful information about enemies or allies, as with the obviator's Read the Opposition feature. Sometimes this calls for a focused collaborative effort between player and DM, as with the cartographer's Tale of Safe Travel. Where the narrative options in a position's features lend themselves to interpretation, the DM works with the players to determine how those options play out, as is the baseline model of every Acquisitions Incorporated campaign.

Position Proficiencies

Accepting a company position with Acquisitions Incorporated means more than just a title and hopes of a paycheck. With it comes access to trade secrets, best practices, and corporate shortcuts central to fulfilling one's role within a franchise. When a character takes a specific company position, they gain proficiency in the tools and skills associated with that position. Such proficiency also extends to a variety of business practices, day-to-day tasks, and hazard mitigations that are all part of the job. Professional functions that characters can add their proficiency bonus to are detailed in the "Position Proficiency" section of each of the following company positions.

Company Tools

The tools and items that are granted to a character as part of a company position are unique objects created and bestowed by Head Office on trusted franchisees. A set of Acquisitions Incorporated tools might resemble mundane tools, but they are never the same. Countless mundane cartographers in the world have proficiency with cartographer's tools. But only an Acquisitions Incorporated cartographer has access to a *cartographer's map case* and the ability to use it.

Magic items gained as part of a company position always require attunement, but they do not count against the number of magic items a character can normally attune to. Each item can be attuned to only by the character to whom it has been granted by Head Office. If the tools of other Acq Inc franchisees are ever found, they cannot be attuned even by characters with the applicable position. (It goes without saying that such tools found at large are expected to be returned to Head Office immediately.)

Each position magic item is representative of the significant mystic expertise of Acquisitions Incorporated—and no matter who might use them, position items always belong to the franchise proper. The use of such items is typically revoked upon leaving the company, and Head Office is known for the diligence with which it retrieves items that are "accidentally" held onto.

Gaining Ranks

You choose your character's position when the character first joins an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. Your character's position rank is equal to your franchise's rank. Starting from rank 1, you gain specialized training (including new proficiencies), special equipment, and your rank 1 position feature. Then, as the franchise grows, the scope of your position grows with it. Each time the franchise gains a rank (normally at levels 5, 11, and 17), your character is promoted to that new rank in their position and gains the appropriate benefits.

Cartographer

I've seen a million places, and I've mapped them all!

—Cartographer's boast

Acquisitions Incorporated missions can lead across vast tracts of wilderness, into ancient ruins, deep underground, or to even more dangerous and remote places. The cartographer selects the method and route of travel for a franchise, and creates and maintains maps of the journey. As the characters travel, the cartographer maps important locations and resources, later providing finished maps to Head Office. The franchise's cartographer is also often responsible for the selection and care of vehicles and mounts.

As a cartographer, you have a sharp eye for detail and take an interest in people, history, and natural features. You help advance your franchise by discovering and mapping new locations or hidden features, acquiring rare maps, and using different modes of transportation in secure and clever ways.

Noteworthy Cartographers: Rosie Beestinger ("C" Team), Brahma Lutier ("B" Team, retired), Pendragon Beestinger ("B" Team), Purnagh Grost

Essential Functions: Create and maintain maps of a franchise's journeys; dictate directions

Position Proficiency: In addition to the proficiencies noted below, you can add your proficiency bonus when you make an ability check to create or examine maps, search for new paths in the wild, or assess a route for possible dangers.

The Cartographer

Franchise Rank	Features
1	Proficiencies and Starting Equipment, It's a Rental
2	Spyglass of Clairvoyance, Tale of Safe Travel
3	Map of Shortcuts, Map of the Moment
4	Elder Cartographer's Glossography, Greater Tale of Safe Travel

Proficiencies and Starting Equipment

As a rank 1 cartographer, you gain proficiency with cartographer's tools, and your choice of vehicles (land) or vehicles (water).

Head Office also grants you the use of cartographer's supplies (quill, ink, parchment, a pair of compasses, calipers, and a ruler), a waterproof leather map case, a spyglass, and a supply of colored inks.

It's a Rental

At rank 1, at the start of any mission, you can requisition a second-hand draft horse and cart (barely functional), riding horses and ponies (typically well aged, one for each party member), passage on a ship or ferry (might require minor labor as part of the fare), and similar transportation. Any damage or losses to requisitioned equipment is expected to be repaid to Head Office.

Spyglass of Clairvoyance

At rank 2, your Head Office-supplied spyglass becomes a common magic item. As an action, you can look through the *spyglass of clairvoyance* at a location within 1 mile of you that is obstructing your view, such as a mountain, castle, or forest. You must then succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom check using cartographer's tools to map the natural terrain found within three miles of that chosen point. You do not gain any knowledge of creatures, structures, or anything other than natural terrain. This property of the spyglass cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Tale of Safe Travel

Starting at rank 2, you gain the ability to perform a 45-minute ritual using your cartographer's tools, maps, and 50 gp in consumed material components. By doing so, you ensure safe travel for you and other creatures, from your current location to another location you could normally reach within one day. The destination must be one to which you have traveled previously, or for which you have an accurate route and map.

PURNAGH GROST

Half-Orc Cartographer (Fighter)

Cartographer Grost was once so lost that he had to sleep on rocks and eat things that were not, strictly speaking, food. Determined to avoid this in future, he began leaving trails of things behind him—trails he would often find again later, or intersect with at odd angles. Imagine his relief when he discovered maps. Grost was not born a cartographer, but that hasn't kept him from reaching the apex of the profession.

If your tale is told with reverence and precision, you and up to six other creatures plus their gear (including vehicles or mounts) become encircled in a magical bubble and are pulled into the Border Ethereal (see chapter 2 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). During the ritual, you tell a story of your future journey, relating details of what will be seen en route. The DM can choose to add to the story, imparting additional details or planting seeds for future adventures. If you wish, the ritual can be ended early, allowing the party to encounter what's being described by the DM.

Whenever the ritual is ended or interrupted by you, all the travelers arrive safely at the destination. At the DM's discretion, all the travelers affected by the ritual can gain the benefit of either a short rest or a long rest during the voyage.

Map of Shortcuts

At rank 3, your map case becomes a common magic item. In addition to storing normal maps, your *cartographer's map case* can be used to generate a special map identifying a shortcut. You can use your action to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, with a success revealing a map buried in your *cartographer's map case* noting a relevant shortcut . Your travel time is reduced by half while you follow that route. If you succeed at the check by 5 or more, the map includes notes on the terrain, granting you advantage on the next ability check you make to travel through the mapped area in the next hour. Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until you finish a long rest.

Map of the Moment

Starting at rank 3, you can use an action to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check and search your *cartographer's map case* to find a map either related to your current mission or inspiring a new one. On a success, you find a map with a prominent landmark. The map has information on the natural terrain within one mile of the landmark. Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until dawn seven days later.

Possible Map Mission Landmarks

d8	Landmark
1	The Ancient Sarcophagus of Gerald Smith
2	A tree labeled "This tree"
3	"The Last Resting Place of My Rich Brother that is Also a Bear Cave"
4	A range of peaks known as the Slightly Wobbly Spires
5	An ever-flowing, nonmagical spigot of pure, clear water in the middle of nowhere
6	A cave filled with screaming bioluminescent worms
7	The most haunted forest for ten miles in any direction
8	A huge pile of rocks with no other rocks within sight

Elder Cartographer's Glossography

When you attain rank 4, you gain a small tome that is an uncommon magic item. The *elder cartographer's glossography* grants advantage on Intelligence or Wisdom checks related to geographical features or locations.

Greater Tale of Safe Travel

Also at rank 4, your Tale of Safe Travel feature can now span up to three days of travel. If your franchise headquarters is mobile, you can include it in your Tale of Safe Travel, and can also include items or goods weighing up to 2,000 pounds.

It's of the utmost importance to remember that a good cartographer knows how to tell a story to a horse. The story does not have to be accurate, but it does have to entertain the horse.

—Rosie Beestinger

Cartographer's Map Case

Why Be a Cartographer?

d8	Reason
1	A paranoid person by nature, you like seeing what's ahead of you at all times.
2	Your parent was a cartographer, their parent was a cartographer, and by the gods, you're going to be one too.
3	You're fairly certain no one else in your party even knows how to hold a map, let alone read one.
4	You like spyglasses. A lot.
5	Your nickname as a child was "the cartography kid."
6	Contrary to popular opinion, the destination is much, much more important than the journey.
7	A good map is like an adventure without the bugs. And the mud. And the wolves.
8	You suffer from the nagging feeling of never knowing why you've come into a room, and you need the professional flourish that lets you cover for that.

Decisionist

I'm not saying there aren't other perspectives. Just that my perspective is the only one that's on-brand.

—Decisionist sales pitch

A decisionist brings decisive leadership to an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. They settle disputes and ensure that the team moves forward toward its goals, often serving as a leader (officially or otherwise) and compass for the party. A signature move of the decisionist is to impress the importance of a particular looming choice on the other franchisees, then call for a vote. The results of all franchise votes are recorded, then later reported to Head Office. Decisionists are also concerned with franchise morale and teamwork, helping all members of the franchise work together effectively.

All decisionists vary in their approach to the task. You might primarily attempt to convince others through charismatic arguments, or through force of will or intellectual cunning. You might lead by example, or by extolling the examples of other people who've done the things you haven't quite gotten around to yet. Many decisionists go on to publish famous tomes, such as the best-selling *Habits of Effective Adventuring Parties* and *I Don't Care If the Rogue Stole Your Coins, We Have a Job to Do*. You help advance the franchise by calling for votes, making sure you're always on the side with the most votes, and resolving disputes within the franchise party.

Noteworthy Decisionists: Donaar Blit'zen ("C" Team), Kelshi Annab

Essential Functions: Receive one extra vote on franchise matters; resolve interparty conflicts

Position Proficiencies: In addition to the proficiencies noted below, you can add your proficiency bonus to an ability check to influence a decision being made by a group, assess the popularity of certain customs or individuals, or boost the morale of franchise hirelings.

KELSHI ANNAB

Human Decisionist (Ranger)

There are decisionists of all stripes. Domineering narcissists gravitate toward the role, to be sure, and occasionally that unyielding demeanor has its purpose. Decisionist Annab approaches the role in another way, considering herself in many ways outside the party she travels with, even though she has served in this capacity for years. When she leverages her *coin of decisionry*, glinting with its final, unswerving resolve, it is because she has heard all.

The Decisonist

Franchise Rank	Features
1	Proficiencies and Starting Equipment, Tiebreaker
2	Absentee Ballot, Coin of Decisionry
3	Better Odds, Inspired Decision
4	Charming Misdemeanor, Clandestine Kit

Proficiencies and Starting Equipment

As a rank 1 decisionist, you gain proficiency with a musical instrument (horn).

Head office also grants you the use of a musical instrument (your choice of horn), a voting kit (ballots, a ballot box, an "I Voted" sticker set), and a coin of decisionry. This large gold coin is emblazoned with the sigil of Acquisitions Incorporated as "heads," and has a "tails" image that varies.

Coin of Decisionry "Tails" Image

d8	Tails
1	Omin Dran
2	Yourself
3	A pumpkin
4	A fourteen-headed hydra (it's a big coin)
5	An old despotic tyrant, their image defaced
6	A demon lord
7	A foaming tankard of beer
8	A Masked Lord of Waterdeep

Tiebreaker

Starting at rank 1, whenever the members of your franchise take a vote, you can present your coin of decisionry and cast two votes.

Absentee Ballot

Starting at rank 2, if a member of your franchise party is absent, you gain their vote and can decide quite confidently how they would have voted. In addition, if a vote is ever taken while you are absent, you can call for a recount and add your two votes to the final voting result.

Coin of Decisionry

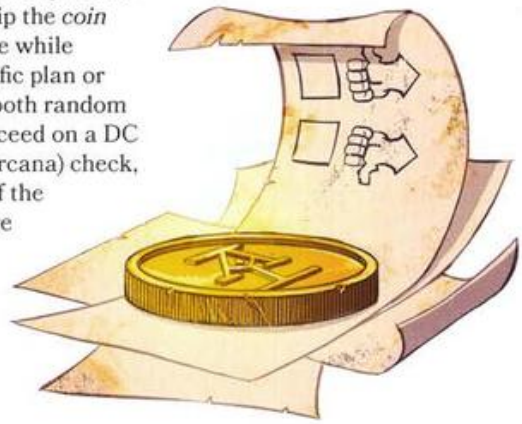
Starting at rank 2, your *coin of decisionry* becomes a common magic item. When you flip the coin, it always lands with the Acquisitions Incorporated sigil face down, and a message appears on the "tails" face. Roll a d4 on the following table to determine the message.

d4	Decision
1	Lucrative
2	Brand Appeal
3	Indeterminate
4	Ruinous

The coin has absolutely no divination abilities, and its results when you use it are random. But nobody else knows that. When a creature within 10 feet of you flips the coin (after having had its powerful prognostication powers dutifully explained), you can exert your will to control its operation as a bonus action, choosing the result that appears after it lands as a means of gently coercing the user toward a specific course of action. The creature flipping the coin can detect your manipulation with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Better Odds

When you reach rank 3, your *coin of decisionry* gains a measure of actual divination power and becomes an uncommon magic item. In addition to its normal function, you can use an action to flip the *coin of decisionry* twice while pondering a specific plan or objective, noting both random results. If you succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, you learn which of the two results is more applicable to the course of action. This property of the coin can't be used again until the next dawn.



Coin of Decisionry

Inspired Decision

Starting at rank 3, whenever a serious franchise vote is taken and the result goes the way you voted, you can inspire the rest of the franchise team with a brief speech. Make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a success, each franchise member of your choice who can hear you gains advantage on the next ability check, attack roll, or saving throw they make in the next hour. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Charming Misdemeanor

As a rank 4 decisionist, you can present your *coin of decisionry* to grant yourself an extra vote when your franchise votes, for a total of three votes. Once you do so, you cannot do so again until dawn seven days later.

Clandestine Kit

At rank 4, your voting kit becomes a common magic item that conceals an extradimensional space. As a bonus action, you can place one tool kit that you are proficient with into the *voting kit*, or can remove it. No other type of object can be placed into the extradimensional space. A creature searching the *voting kit* finds and extracts the tool kit with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check.

Additionally, you can use the *voting kit* to cast *charm person* (save DC 15). This property of the kit can't be used again until the next dawn.

> Decisionists work best when a verdict is unilateral and in direct contradiction to the rest of their team. Do the opposite of whatever they want, even if you want to do that thing too. It's about setting an example and establishing a pecking order.
>
> —Donaar Blit'zen

CHRIS WALTON

Why Be a Decisionist?

d8	Reason
1	It's always you who picks where everyone has lunch.
2	Roughly half your choices are the right ones. You might as well just toss a coin for it.
3	You have no idea. In fact, you're constantly plagued by indecision.
4	Democracy is the greatest force for change in the world, but is ruined by everyone else voting.
5	All the other positions were taken.
6	You've always felt it was your calling to tell other people what to do. Now to make it official.
7	When faced with two choices, you've always yearned for the freedom to choose both.
8	As a child, you had a sibling make you choose which of your toys lived or died. You were never the same.

Documancer

Contracts have mystical power. Break my contract and I'll use your bones for my next quill.

—Documancer's warning

Every great Acquisitions Incorporated quest begins with a contract from Head Office—and a franchise's documancer is most likely the one who controls and channels the power of that contract. A documancer bears the responsibility of managing each of a franchise's quests, of ensuring that every condition of the quest is fulfilled, and of recording and sending on information vital to Head Office when the mission is complete. When creating contracts with other organizations, a documancer makes sure that the language benefits both the franchise and Acquisitions Incorporated.

As a documancer, you are respected for having the commitment and mental fortitude required to work with Head Office. You advance your franchise by using documancy for communication, insisting on recording all deals in writing, retaining records, destroying other records, and recalling vital information.

Not everyone truly appreciates the art of documancy, and only the best and brightest are chosen for this most important work. Come to think of it, I'm not sure you make the cut.

—Walnut Dankgrass

Favorite Methods to Destroy Documents

d6	Method
1	Any way you like, provided you make a copy first
2	Mimic shredder
3	Fake dragon-head incinerator
4	The bottomless hole in the basement—at least you're pretty sure it's bottomless
5	Feeding it to the goat out back
6	Making your coworkers eat it by slipping it into their food, piece by piece—it's the only way to be sure

Noteworthy Documancers: Walnut Dankgrass ("C" Team), Brynshal Flume

Essential Functions: Record information; track job and quest details within the franchise

Position Proficiency: In addition to the proficiencies noted below, you can add your proficiency bonus to an ability check to organize lore, analyze official or arcane documents, or convey a legally binding point of view.

The Documancer

Franchise Rank	Features
1	Proficiencies and Starting Equipment, Gift of Words
2	Documancy Satchel, Fluent in Boss
3	Satchel of Holding, Document Flexibility
4	Scroll Humidor, Scroll Service

BRYNSHAL FLUME

Air Genasi Documancer (Sorcerer)

When other children borrowed her toys, Brynshal kept unnervingly robust records—duration, wear, remittance in case of loss, that kind of thing. In time, this hunger to define and make official the rhythm of daily life found its expression in documancy, a kind of mystic bureaucratic art founded by Omin Dran. Anything you put a signature to has power. And Brynshal wields that power with ease.

(The genasi can be found in *Princes of the Apocalypse* and the *Elemental Evil Player's Companion*.)

Proficiencies and Starting Equipment

As a rank 1 documancer, you gain proficiency with calligrapher's supplies.

Head office also grants you the use of calligrapher's supplies (ink, a dozen sheets of parchment, and three quills), a documancy satchel for your calligrapher's supplies, a ledger, sealing wax, copper and silver leaf, a documancer's seal of limited authority, and a scroll case.

Gift of Words

At rank 1, you are fluent in the semi-arcane language of documancy. This knowledge grants you advantage on Intelligence checks to decipher codes or similar scripts. The DM might also provide you with hints whenever you try to solve a puzzle or decipher clues involving writing.

Documancy Satchel

At rank 2, your documancy satchel becomes a common magic item, allowing you to magically send and receive documents to and from Head Office through a special pouch. Your *documancy satchel* magically produces prewritten and signature-ready contracts at your request, covering most common contractual needs. It also occasionally produces sticky notes printed with useful information and inspirational quotes from Head Office.

Fluent in Boss

Also at rank 2, your documancer training allows you to better process Head Office communications, as well as to understand what pleases your superiors. You can cast the *augury* spell, with the spell's omens of weal or woe based solely on the perspective of Head Office. (It should be noted that Head Office at times has a surprisingly high disregard for potential woe to its employees.) Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until dawn seven days later.

Satchel of Holding

At rank 3, your *documancy satchel* gains additional features and becomes an uncommon magic item. One of the satchel's pouches now functions as a *bag of holding*.

Additionally, you can use an action to draw forth from the documancy satchel a *spell scroll* of *comprehend languages*. The scroll vanishes when used, or ten minutes after it appears. This property of the bag can't be used again until the next dawn.

Document Flexibility

Also at rank 3, you gain proficiency with a forgery kit. One such kit (containing several different types of ink, a variety of parchments and papers, several quills, seals and sealing wax, gold and silver leaf, and small tools to sculpt melted wax to mimic a seal) is always contained within the extradimensional space of your *documancy satchel*.

Scroll Humidor

At rank 4, your *documancy satchel* gains additional power and becomes a rare magic item. Within the satchel, a dedicated extradimensional space can hold up to thirty documents or *spell scrolls*. Placing a single document into the scroll humidor is an action. Drawing forth a desired scroll is a bonus action.

Scroll Service

Also at rank 4, you can use an action to request one *spell scroll* containing a spell of up to 3rd level from Head Office. If you succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, the scroll instantly appears within your *documancy satchel*. Only you can use this scroll. The scroll vanishes when used, or ten minutes after it has been summoned. After a successful use, this property of the satchel can't be used again until dawn seven days later. If you failed the check, this property can't be used again until the next dawn.

Documancy Satchel

Why Be a Documancer?

d8	Reason
1	You heard a rumor once that signing a contract with your off hand is technically nonbinding, and you're desperate to see if it's true. For reasons.
2	All businesses have their ups and downs, but there's always money to be made from "processing fees."
3	You have a habit of always being clear about what you've promised, but never saying when you'll do it.
4	You love doing decorative scrollwork on documents, knowing that's the best place to hide the fine print.
5	As a child, you learned to cross your fingers behind your back when making a promise. Now you yearn to make that legally binding.
6	Your habit of screaming, "No take backs!" after any group decision seemed to suggest your true calling.
7	You believe that language is an art, not a science. Who's to say what is or isn't a "real" word?
8	The smell of old parchment makes you giddy.

Hoardsperson

Disbursement of coin is at my discretion. Be really nice to me.

—Hoardsperson joke (not joking)

As the name suggests, Acquisitions Incorporated is all about the acquiring, and the hoardsperson's job is all about storing that hard-earned loot. Each hoardsperson plays the vital role of managing a franchise's resources—including the inventory of all supplies used and treasure gained during an adventure. Hoardspersons pay particular attention to making sure that supplies are requisitioned through Acquisitions Incorporated-approved sources whenever possible, and

ensuring that the proper selection of loot is sent to Head Office at the end of a mission.

As a hoardsperson, you are known as a trustworthy and responsible individual. You support your franchise by demonstrating accuracy, avoiding shortfalls, and anticipating resource needs.

Noteworthy Hoardspersons: K'thriss Drow'b ("C" Team), Phoenix Anvil ("B" Team), Two Dry Cloaks

Essential Functions: Manage stores and items; track resources

Position Proficiency: In addition to the proficiencies noted below, you can add your proficiency bonus to an ability check to negotiate a price for goods and services, assess the quality of equipment and treasure, or analyze resources in a local area.

The Hoardsperson

Franchise Rank	Features
1	Proficiencies and Starting Equipment, What a Deal
2	Living Loot Satchel, Living the Good Life
3	Secret Satchel, That Thing You Need
4	Portable Hole Satchel, That Expensive Thing You Need

Proficiencies and Starting Equipment

As a rank 1 hoardsperson, you gain proficiency with jeweler's tools.

Head office also grants you the use of jeweler's tools (a small saw and hammer, files, pliers, and tweezers) and an account ledger, as well as up to 5 gp worth of equipment from the following options: barrel, basket, block and tackle, bucket, chest, flask or tankard, jug or pitcher, iron pot, pouch, sack, saddlebags, vial, and waterskin.

What a Deal

Also at rank 1, you can use your extensive supply network to buy one item found on any table in the "Mounts and Vehicles" or "Trade Goods" sections in chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook* and have it delivered to your franchise headquarters within one day. With a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, you also negotiate a 50 percent discount on the item.

If you fail the check, you cannot use this feature again until you finish a long rest. When you use this feature successfully twice, you cannot use it again until your franchise attains the next rank.

Living Loot Satchel

As a rank 2 hoardsperson, you are granted the use of a *living loot satchel*, which is an uncommon magic item. It functions as a *bag of holding* and is available in a variety of colors and styles.

Class-Based Living Loot Satchel

Class	Satchel
Barbarian	Broad belt with a dozen hanging pockets
Bard	Lute case
Cleric	Hollowed-out holy tome
Druid	Made from natural, organic, locally sourced woven fibers
Fighter	A thick, battle-scarred iron lockbox
Paladin	A metal case with fine engraving and scrollwork
Ranger	A fur-lined bindle
Rogue	A nondescript coin pouch
Sorcerer	A battered leather satchel, prone to spitting out multicolored sparks at the seams
Warlock	A patchwork monster-leather satchel with a "purely decorative" fanged mouth.
Wizard	A pocket dimension hidden up your sleeve or inside your hat

TWO DRY CLOAKS

Tabaxi Hoardsperson (Rogue)

Forever in search of "twinkles," Two Dry Cloaks has a deep enthusiasm for treasure and a broad definition of what "treasure" might mean. As an old saying has it, "the hoard is the heart of a franchise," and the tabaxi makes that case for her franchise every day. She believes that the contents of a hoard—as delivered to and from Head Office by way of the hoardsperson's *living loot satchel*—are the most true, most dispassionate assessment of a team's progress.

(The tabaxi can be found in *Volo's Guide to Monsters*.)

The *living loot satchel* is a kind of magical being that safeguards the franchise's funds and valuables. Its innards are connected to a secure coffer within Head Office's vault in Waterdeep, to which the satchel periodically transfers the franchise's wealth. As an action, you can transfer any amount of your franchise funds back to your satchel with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check.

Living the Good Life

Also at rank 2, Head Office trusts that as long as your needs are met, you have no reason to skim any profits. You maintain a wealthy lifestyle at no cost to you.

Secret Satchel

As a rank 3 hoardsperson, your *living loot satchel* gets an upgrade to function as the replica chest used for the *Leomund's secret chest* spell, becoming a rare magic item. You can open the secret chest through your *living loot satchel* to deposit or withdraw items—even items that wouldn't normally fit in your satchel, but which fit within the chest. Thanks to Head Office striking deals you don't want to know about with extraplanar creatures you really don't want to know about, there is no chance for the spell to end.

That Thing You Need

At rank 3, you can use a bonus action to reach into your *living loot satchel* and make a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. On a success, you draw forth an item of your choice on the Adventuring Gear table in chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*. The item must be of a size that can fit into your secret chest and be worth no more than 15 gp. Once you attempt to draw five items from your satchel, you cannot draw forth any more items until the next dawn.

Portable Hole Satchel

At rank 4, your *living loot satchel* receives another upgrade, becoming a very rare magic item. The secret chest accessed by your satchel now has the storage capacity of a *portable hole*—6 feet in diameter and 10 feet deep. As before, you can place any appropriately sized object into the *portable-hole*-sized chest, even if it wouldn't normally fit into your satchel.

That Expensive Thing You Need

Also at rank 4, when you use your That Thing You Need feature, you can requisition any item of up to 250 gp in value, as long as it would fit into the confines of your satchel's *portable hole*.

Why Be a Hoardsperson?

d8	Reason
1	You once tried to dive into a huge pool of gold coins. It hurt.
2	You've been betrayed by your adventuring party before, and there's no way now that you'll trust anyone else to hold on to the loot
3	Once, through a series of increasingly complex negotiations, you traded a paper clip for temporary control of a minor fiefdom.
4	Material possessions don't mean that much to you. Or at least that's the story you're going with.
5	You've never had a problem spending other people's money. Surely keeping other people's money can't be that hard.
6	You believe there's no such thing as worthless goods. Only unmotivated buyers.
7	You're not a hoarder. More of a passionate collector. You can stop anytime you want. Really.
8	Given the personalities of the other party members, it was mutually agreed that you were the only one who could be trusted

Loremonger

I never forget a detail ... though many wish I would.

—Loremonger mantra

Information has value, and the loremonger is that information's keeper. A franchise's loremonger studies and records all lore relevant to its operation, including tracking the economic, technical, and arcane methods by which the franchise can be improved. A loremonger records the deeds and history of the franchise, including the names of places visited and people met during missions. Those records are then sent to Head Office (often through a franchise's documancer) to ensure brand integrity.

As a loremonger, you are a studious individual, usually with an interest in history or technical subjects. You might revel in your role, working as a central figure in your franchise as you use your knowledge to promote it. Or you might operate from the shadows, resembling a clever spymaster and allowing others to be the franchise's public face. You help advance your franchise by discovering secrets, tracking important lore gained during the characters' travels, and reporting on competitors' goals and methods.

Noteworthy Loremongers: Mabannok Kovri
Essential Functions: Record names, dates, and vital information

The key to the hoardsperson's job is cataloging all goods that enter the party's possession. You may also catalog goods that do not belong to the party. Sometimes it works.

—K'thriss Drow'b

Loremongers talk a lot. It's best to let them.

—Omin Dran

Position Proficiency: In addition to the proficiencies noted below, you can add your proficiency bonus to an ability check to analyze the operation of a franchise, assess historical records, or decipher codes.

The Loremonger

Franchise Rank	Features
1	Proficiencies and Starting Equipment, Whisper Jar
2	Need to Know, Whispered Encyclopedia
3	Construction Permits, Whispered Warnings
4	Efficient Upgrades, Whispered Arcana

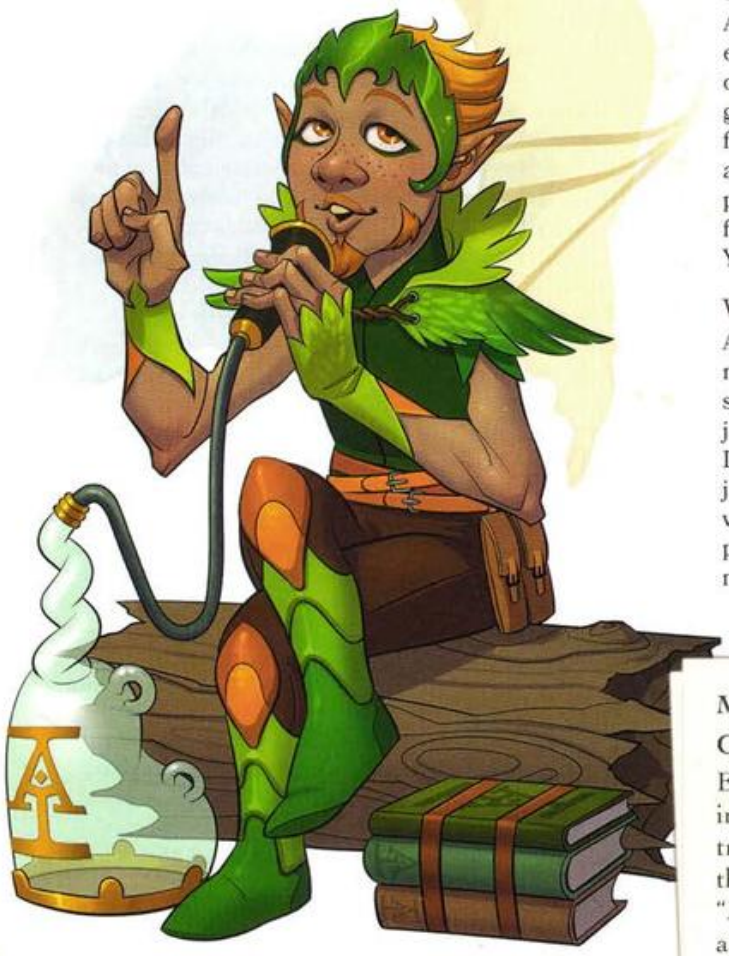
Proficiencies and Starting Equipment

As a rank 1 loremonger, you gain one of the following proficiencies of your choice: artisan's tools (choose type), navigator's tools, vehicles (land), or vehicles (water).

Head office also grants you the use of an appropriate tool kit if you chose a tool proficiency, as well as ink and an ink pen.

Whisper Jar

Also at rank 1, you are the beneficiary of a *whisper jar*—a common magic item resembling an ether-filled jar with a long tap hose. The jar is used to record others' stories and your own observations, like a verbal notebook with unlimited space. The *whisper jar* records as fast as a creature can speak into it, and whispers back words at the same pace they were recorded. Activating the playback of a particular recording is an action.



Things Recorded in Your Whisper Jar

d8	Recording
1	A live recording of the only performance of the mostly forgotten stage play *Tabaxi on a Hot Tin Roof*
2	The life's work of the loremonger who owned the jar before you
3	Every courageous thought you've ever had, to cover for how scared you are most of the time
4	Everything, because everyone else around you will eat their words one day!
5	The top seven places to eat fried rat skewers in every settlement you've ever visited
6	The entire family tree of every royal line, extant or lost, in Faerûn
7	A moment-by-moment review of your favorite Jim Darkmagic stage performance
8	The sound of raucous applause, which you play back liberally

Need to Know

At rank 2, your insight grants you preternatural knowledge of the creatures around you. As an action, select one humanoid you can see and make a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. On a success, you learn the following information: the creature's name, up to three aliases it has used within the past month, its primary profession, and its skill proficiencies. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest. You can use this feature only once on any creature.

Whispered Encyclopedia

At rank 2, your *whisper jar* becomes an uncommon magic item that can tap into the broader lore of Acquisitions Incorporated. As a bonus action, you ask the jar for information on a specific subject and make a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check. On a success, the jar plays back a recording on that subject, made somewhere, sometime by another Acq Inc loremonger. This property of the *whisper jar* can't be used again until the next dawn.

MABANNOK KOVRI

Gnome Loremonger (Druid)

Even without a *whisper jar*, Mabannok Kovri is an incomparable trove of lore. With the jar—that misty, transparent urn that all loremongers use as a tool of their station—they can scoot close to omniscience. "Mab" decants their *whisper jar* to share and protect any information vital to the franchise. But they have a particular sideline hobby of greedily trapping ribald dwarven poetry and recipes that "honor the noble turnip."

Whisper Jar

Construction Permits

At rank 3, your knowledge of best practices for improving an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise results in a 20 percent reduction in your franchise's monthly costs (see "Franchise Costs" earlier in this chapter, and "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" later in this chapter).

In addition, choose one room in your franchise headquarters that belongs to you alone. That room gains one cosmetic feature, and the headquarters as a whole gains one secret feature over and above those gained normally through franchise advancement. See "Headquarters Features" earlier in this chapter for more information.

Whispered Warnings

Also at rank 3, your *whisper jar* gains additional power and becomes a rare magic item. As an action, you can cause the jar to function as a *wand of enemy detection*, whereupon it whispers the direction to foes within range. This property of the *whisper jar* can't be used again until the next dawn.

Efficient Upgrades

At rank 4, your knowledge of franchise lore and development yields further dividends. Your franchise headquarters gains one weapon feature and one cosmetic feature over and above those gained normally through franchise advancement. See "Headquarters Features" earlier in this chapter.

Whispered Arcana

Also at rank 4, your *whisper jar* gains access to even more magic. By whispering the name of one of the following spells into the jar as an action, you can cast that spell from the jar: *detect evil and good*, *detect magic*, *detect poison and disease*, *find traps*, *identify*, or *locate animals or plants*. This property of the *whisper jar* can't be used again until the next dawn.

Why Be a Loremonger?

d8	Reason
1	Your favorite thing to hear is, "I probably shouldn't say anything, but did you know ... ?"
2	Your *whisper jar* is a better conversationalist than most people you've ever met.
3	You can't keep a secret for the life of you, and you need to tell someone this thing you know or it's going to kill you!
4	You never know when someone else's words will come in handy.
5	Peoples and cultures can never die as long as their stories are still told.
6	You talked about a really cool idea once when you were drunk, and can't remember a word of it now. That'll never happen again.
7	A person is only as good as their word, and you feel compelled to keep others honest.
8	You can't read or write, so this whole recording-and-playing-back-what-you-say-in-a-jar thing is a huge benefit.

Obviator

I adjust the odds and remove obstacles to create maximum convenience for our franchise.

—Obviator creed

Obstacles abound along the path to riches. A franchise's mission success might require combating a rival organization's disinformation attempts one day, then besting a castle's defenses the next. The day after that, some poor sap named Bob might need to be disposed of. And no matter what the type of challenge that needs to be overcome, the franchise's obviator determines the optimal way to shut down and destroy that challenge. (Nothing personal, Bob. It's just business.)

As an obviator, you hatch convoluted plots to fight the overwhelming odds presented by each mission—by whatever means are necessary. Sometimes, you might prefer brute strength and improvisation. Other times, you might undertake a deep study of conflicts and rival organizations, working carefully to stay three steps ahead of the opposition. In all cases, though, you help advance your franchise by hatching effective plans and tactics, anticipating problems, and learning about your foes—ideally before they can treat you as an obstacle to their own success.

Noteworthy Obviators: Lok

Essential Functions: Destroy targets (people and information); study conflicts

Position Proficiency: In addition to the proficiencies noted below, you can add your proficiency bonus to an ability check to make sense of an enemy's tactics, discern a hidden threat, or intimidate a foe whose weaknesses you have previously assessed (see "Read the Opposition" below).

The Obviator

Franchise Rank	Features
1	Proficiencies and Starting Equipment, Read the Opposition
2	Alchemist's Insight, Obviator's Lenses
3	Advanced Preparations, Travel Alchemical Kit
4	Enhanced Lenses, Obviate the Opposition

Proficiencies and Starting Equipment

As a rank 1 obviator, you gain proficiency with alchemist's supplies.

Head office also grants you the use of alchemist's supplies (two glass beakers, a metal frame to hold a beaker in place over an open flame, a glass stirring rod, a small mortar and pestle, and a pouch of common alchemical ingredients including salt, powdered iron, and purified water); your choice of a vial of acid, a flask of alchemist's fire, or a vial of antitoxin; and a hunting trap.

Read the Opposition

Also at rank 1, you can attempt to get a reading on one creature you can see, trying to learn useful information about it. As a bonus action, make a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check. On a success, you learn three details of your choice about the creature. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest. You can use this feature only once on any creature.

> Obviation is as much a philosophy as it is a practice. It's not a good fit for those who want to remain … you know, fully alive.
>
> —Omin Dran

Possible details you might learn include the creature's goals or motivation, bonds or ideals, personality traits, flaws, combat strategy (including common attack methods or tactics), financial information, lair location, allies or foes, romantic entanglements, sense of humor, or favorite songs.

Alchemist's Insight

At rank 2, you can use an action to use your alchemist's supplies to identify any unknown substance (including alchemical items, potions, and other magical substances). Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until you finish a long rest.

Where You First Dabbled in Alchemy

d8	Learning Experience
1	You traveled with a charlatan alchemist for years, until they were arrested for selling fake healing potions. You still remember how to get the taste just right.
2	You were once the head dishwasher in a famous wizard's college.
3	One of your parents was a healer in a small outpost, and they taught you that even the most mundane flora and natural materials can be used to wondrous effect.
4	While lost in the Underdark, you were forced to consume mold, fungus, and insect parts to survive. You developed a taste for that sort of thing.
5	You think you might be addicted to holy water. You just can't stop drinking it long enough to find out for sure.
6	You were once the personnel manager of a struggling business and needed to come up with a herbal cure-all that would keep employees awake for eighteen-hour shifts. No one died. Mostly.
7	As the child of a wealthy and despotic noble, you learned to smell poisoned pastries a mile off. A shame that your siblings weren't so talented.
8	As a server in a tavern, you refined the perfect hangover cure but never wrote the recipe down. Now you're desperate to recreate it.

LOK

Dwarf Obviator (Cleric)

Like many Obviators, "Lok" chooses to use a working name rather than her actual name out of an abundance of caution. Obviators are cautious because they know precisely how dangerous any moment can be—and they are dangerous for the same reason. An obviator is like a lethal walking library. And if you were to face some kind of walking library at some point, Lok would know exactly what to do about it.

Travel Alchemical Kit

Obviator's Lenses

Also at rank 2, you gain the use of an uncommon magic item taking the form of a pair of spectacles, a spyglass, a monocle, or any other device with one or two lenses. When you look through the *obviator's lenses*, you use a bonus action to make them function as *eyes of minute seeing* or *eyes of the eagle*. Once you make this choice, it cannot be changed until the next dawn.

Advanced Preparations

At rank 3, you gain the ability to declare that you're totally prepared. This preparedness takes the from of asking yourself one question, then making a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check. On a success, you recall information you could have uncovered through earlier research about your mission. The information can be a discreet revelation, a vague hint, or even a riddle. Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until you finish a long rest.

Travel Alchemical Kit

Also at rank 3, Head Office provides you with a travel alchemical kit—an uncommon magic item containing miniaturized versions of both alchemist's supplies and a poisoner's kit (glass vials, a mortar and pestle, chemicals, and a glass stirring rod). You gain proficiency with a poisoner's kit as part of this upgrade.

You can use this magical kit as long as it is on your person, with no need to draw or stow it. If you are ever searched, finding your travel alchemical kit requires a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight) check.

Enhanced Lenses

At rank 4, your *obviator's lenses* gain additional power and become a rare magic item. The lenses now function as both *eyes of the eagle* and *eyes of minute seeing*.

Additionally, you can focus the power of the lenses to gain accuracy in combat, gaining advantage on a weapon attack roll (no action required). If that attack hits, roll one additional weapon damage die. This property of the lenses can't be used again until the next dawn.

Obviate the Opposition

Also at rank 4, when you use your Read the Opposition feature and fail the check, you still learn one detail about the target creature, as chosen by the DM. Additionally, you can use Read the Opposition more than once on the same creature, but if you do so, you cannot use that feature again on the same creature until you finish a long rest.

Why Be an Obviator?

d8	Reason
1	There's nothing that excites you more than a puzzle you can't immediately solve.
2	Your favorite saying is, "All according to plan." Especially when you have no idea what's going on.
3	You have an entire room dedicated to notes and sketches connected by red yarn.
4	Your plans are so detailed that they have plans of their own.
5	You find the little details so much more interesting than ... well, anything else.
6	You already had the chemical burns on your hands. Might as well make it official.
7	Methodical. Calculating. Brilliant. One day, you hope these words will apply to you.
8	It's not paranoia if they really are out to get you. And if you're out to get them first.

Occultant

Our next kill changes everything.

—Occultant divination

An occultant tracks the creatures and foes that a franchise has bested or killed, weighing them against the deeds the franchise has achieved. Using the eldritch abacus for which this position is named, an occultant measures the karmic coordinates of their franchise, hoping to gain portents of that which is yet to come.

Like all occultants, you are a grim and enigmatic figure. Even your closest companions might be wary of the power you channel—and nobody wears that aura of dark mystery like you do. You help advance your franchise by determining whether foes should live or die, prognosticating correctly (or at least authoritatively), keeping the rest of the party attuned to the importance of karma, and making the right calls on how best to "clean up" any incorrect readings or misunderstandings.

Noteworthy Occultants: Talanatha Three-Coins
Essential Functions: Track kills; assess the value to the franchise of the living and the dead
Position Proficiency: In addition to the proficiencies noted below, you can add your proficiency bonus to an ability check to intimidate a creature close to death, assess what disease or poison killed a creature, or explain what that dead body is doing under your bed at the inn.

TALANATHA THREE-COINS

Tiefling Occultant (Paladin)

Occultants know that the unsettled feeling in the pit of your stomach comes from somewhere and has a purpose—and nobody can measure out and use that purpose like they can. As Talanatha "reads" fallen foes, she charts her party's cosmic effects and can even try to smooth out the fabric of causality. As a tiefling, she often generates a kind of ambient unease in others, but she is always certain to account for this carefully, lest it bloom into "the unforeseen" that is the enemy of every enterprise.

The Occultant

Franchise Rank	Features
1	Proficiencies and Starting Equipment, Read the Kill
2	Eldritch Occultant, Bring Out Your Dead
3	Bead of Instant Karma, Death's Omen
4	Bead of Diverted Karma, Correct the Balance

Proficiencies and Starting Equipment

As a rank 1 occultant, you gain proficiency with one of the following of your choice: cook's utensils, leatherworker's tools, or weaver's tools.

Head office also grants you the use of a tool kit for your chosen proficiency, a merchant's scale, five waterproof belt pouches in which to store creature parts or other tools, and a unique item known as an occultant abacus (sometimes just referred to as an occultant), whose beads resemble tiny skulls.

Read the Kill

Also at rank 1, your occultant abacus not only tracks your franchise's kills, it helps you determine the impact of those kills on the franchise's fate. Over a period of 1 minute, you can study a creature killed by someone in your franchise within the last 24 hours, then grant the character who slew it a d10. Once within the next hour, that character can add the d10 to an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw. If it's not clear who administered the killing blow, you grant this benefit to a random creature involved in the fight. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Ways to Read the Kill

d6	Reading
1	Using a tiny bellows to pump one last breath into a corpse.
2	Reading the entrails with special reading-the-entrails glasses.
3	Burning a small piece of the body and looking for shapes in the smoke.
4	A cautious, reasoned, professional guesstimate.
5	Careful measurements. The distance between nostrils. The difference between the index finger and the middle finger. The elasticity of the ear lobe.
6	You take a long, careful look, and then decide based on which fellow franchisee has been nice to you lately.

Eldritch Occultant

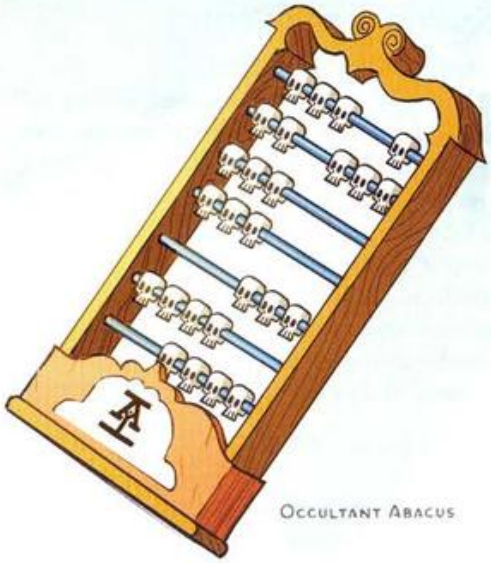
Starting at rank 2, your occultant abacus becomes an uncommon magic item that can track lives both eliminated and saved. While holding your *occultant abacus* within 5 feet of a creature killed within the past 24 hours, you can cast the *augury* spell. The course of action you inquire about with the spell does not need to have any connection to the dead creature. This property of the *occultant abacus* can't be used again until the next dawn.

Bring Out Your Dead

Also at rank 2, you regain the use of your Read the Kill feature after you finish a short or long rest.

Bead of Instant Karma

At rank 3, one of the beads on your *occultant abacus* channels the power of instant karma, turning the *occultant abacus* into a rare magic item. As a reaction, you can target one creature you can see that is about to attempt an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw, either granting advantage or imposing disadvantage on the roll. The bead crumbles to dust when used, reappearing on your *occultant abacus* at the next dawn.



Occultant Abacus

Death's Omen

Also at rank 3, you gain the ability to read the grim portents of a creature's demise. As a bonus action, choose a creature you can see that is below its hit point maximum and make a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check. On a success, you determine whether this creature's immediate death would have neutral, negative, or positive ramifications for you and your franchise. If the ramifications are different for you and the franchise, you learn this as well.

Bead of Diverted Karma

At rank 4, one of the beads on your *occultant abacus* allows you to divert karma to where it's needed, turning the *occultant abacus* into a very rare magic item. While the bead is unused, you know automatically when any creature you can see is about to make an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw with disadvantage. When such a roll is made, you can use a reaction to grant a d10 to a different creature you can see. That creature can add the d10 to any ability check, attack roll, or saving throw it makes within the next minute. The bead crumbles to dust when used, reappearing on your *occultant abacus* at the next dawn.

Correct the Balance

As a rank 4 occultant, you learn that sometimes the death of a creature has unintended consequences. Within seven days of a creature's death, you can use your *occultant abacus* to divine ways to reverse or mitigate events resulting from that death. As an action, make a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check. On a success, you learn the relevant information based on the nature of the creature and its place in the world.

If you fail the check, this property of the *occultant abacus* can't be used again until the next dawn. If you succeed on the check, this property can't be used again until dawn seven days later.

I don't really understand occultants, and to be honest, they scare the Abyss out of me.

—Jim Darkmagic

Why Be an Occultant?

d8	Reason
1	You believe in karmic balance, but hate the idea that "balance" means good and bad things can both happen to you. Good things happening to you and bad things happening to other people seems perfectly reasonable.
2	You love drinking tea and hate cleaning up, so pretending that the dregs in those dozens of empty cups are there to show ill omens and portents is a perfect cover.
3	You collected beads carved as skulls as a child. Nobody ever told you there was a career in that sort of thing.
4	You watched someone close to you die, and were overcome by the feeling that you should be making money off it somehow.
5	You've always owned a stuffed cat. You're not sure where it came from, but it's given you great career advice so far.
6	You've always worn a lot of black.
7	You really wanted a job where you can hide a fog machine under the desk for dramatic effect during meetings.
8	You have an obsession with death that clearly marks you for great things.

Secretarian

I've sold ice in Icewind Dale.

—Secretarian's boast

A secretarian's focus is on people—and all the potential value that might be wrung out of them. Every person met outside a franchise is a potential customer to a secretarian, who does whatever they can to bring that relationship to fulfillment. A secretarian seeks always to promote their franchise and gain greater value than they give. They have the skills to negotiate with subemployees, temporary hirelings, seasonal staff, and other humanoid (usually) resources. When staff members have problems, the secretarian is the one who patiently listens (or at least pretends to) until everything calms down.

As a secretarian, you are respected for having the fortitude to listen to both customers and coworkers without going insane. You help advance your franchise by keeping staff happy (enough), hiring competent (enough) workers, coming up with slogans and catchphrases, launching marketing schemes, and getting jingles and slogans stuck in customer's heads. And while your superiors don't officially condone undermining the branding efforts of other organizations, no one can argue with the effectiveness of that approach.

Noteworthy Secretarians: Certainty Dran, Dunbar of Spreck

Essential Functions: Extract information; assess the strengths and weaknesses of others

CHRIS WALTON

DUNBAR OF SPRECK

Sun Elf Secretarian (Barbarian)

Spreck isn't a real place, but Dunbar knows most people won't check. They'll see the "of" in there and think, "Spreck, you say! Sounds fancy." Maintaining a protective patina of efficiency around himself, the franchise, and the larger organization is his specialty. Secretarians talk to each other more than they talk to their own party members. But that works out in the end, because the secretarian network's limitless perspectives mean that the network often knows more about franchisees than they do themselves.

Position Proficiency: In addition to the proficiencies noted below, you can add your proficiency bonus to an ability check to convince a suspicious crowd of your good (or at least non-evil) intentions, encourage franchise hirelings to work faster, or improvise a jingle extolling the virtues of your franchise.

The Secretarian

Franchise Rank	Features
1	Proficiencies and Starting Equipment, Sending Stone
2	Portfolio Keeper, Rumor Mill
3	Cards of Sending, Improved Rumor Mill
4	Always Hiring, Charming Introduction

Proficiencies and Starting Equipment

As a rank 1 secretarian, you gain proficiency with one of the following of your choice: gaming set, musical instrument, or disguise kit.

Head office also grants you the use of a tool kit for your chosen proficiency, a collection of sales brochures, a set of business cards, a metal bell, and a set of fine clothes.

Sending Stone

Also at rank 1, you are given use of an Acquisitions Incorporated *sending stone*, an uncommon magic item that resembles a gemstone in a bold setting. It functions like a normal *sending stone*, except that it has no matching stone and allows communication with Head Office, specific secretarians you know, and the secretarian nearest your location. You must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check to establish contact. Once the stone is successfully used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Making contact with another secretarian assumes that they are in possession of their own *sending stone*.

Quirks of Your Sending Stone

d8	Quirk
1	It's a flip stone.
2	It gets great reception everywhere except in your headquarters.
3	It sometimes picks up other magical conversations.
4	It's the perfect size, shape, and weight to be used as a skipping stone.
5	It heats up when you use it, to the extent that it once burned through your gloves.
6	It has an obnoxious ringtone that you can't work out how to change.
7	It fails to notify you of incoming messages except for a faint pulsating glow.
8	It's voice activated, so that every time you talk to someone, it tries to send a message to someone else.

Portfolio Keeper

At rank 2, you gain the use of a weathered leather pouch that is an uncommon magic item. The *portfolio keeper* holds and organizes notes, brochures, and business cards bearing your contact information. It also has an inexhaustible supply of brochures related to your franchise's current branding scheme.

When you meet someone for the first time, their details and a rough sketch are magically stored on a small parchment card in the *portfolio keeper*. You can access the details of any such stored card as a bonus action.

My daughter Certainty created the secretarian role. Proved it out as a concept. I told her we didn't need them. I was wrong.

—Omin Dran

Sending Stone

Rumor Mill

Also at rank 2, whenever your franchise begins a major quest or mission, make a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check. On a success, you can learn up to three rumors related to creatures or organizations involved in the mission, which come to you through your *sending stone*. These rumors reflect current or historical knowledge possessed by Acquisitions Incorporated or the organization's many contacts.

Cards of Sending

At rank 3, the power of your *portfolio keeper* becomes more potent, making it a rare magic item. When you give out a business card stored in your *portfolio keeper*, you can choose to have the card allow its recipient to contact you through your *sending stone* as if they had cast a *sending* spell. A business card loses this power seven days after it has been given out, and no more than five cards can have this power at one time.

You can also use your *sending stone* to cast *sending* and contact anyone who has one of your business cards. Once you use this feature of the stone, you cannot use it again until dawn seven days later.

Improved Rumor Mill

At rank 3, when you use your Rumor Mill feature, the DM provides you with a sense of which parts of a particular rumor are inaccurate, if any. You do not necessarily learn the truth behind those false rumors.

Always Hiring

At rank 4, you have little trouble finding the right people for the job. As an action, while in a populated area, you can make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check to locate an NPC who can provide a service immediately, no questions asked, for the standard fee (see "Services" in chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*). On a successful check, information regarding the potential hire comes to you as supernatural insight, word of mouth, an advertisement blowing into your face, or a similarly convenient method. Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until you finish a long rest.

Hirelings acquired through this feature are in addition to any franchise staff. They can be invited to bolster existing staff or fill a sudden need, but they are not part of the baseline staff gained through a franchise's rank. Their pay is not covered by the franchise's normal costs.

Charming Introduction

Also at rank 4, you are able to make a focused effort to keep a potential customer's attention. When you provide a humanoid with a business card from your *portfolio keeper*, you can cast *charm person* on them (save DC 15). The spell ends prematurely if the character loses the business card.

Why Be a Secretarian?

d8	Reason
1	You believe that people shouldn't work harder; they should work smarter. And then they should work harder.
2	You've always yearned to be in the people business, because inanimate objects can't pay you.
3	Being able to hand out "Employee of the Month" stickers has been a life-long dream.
4	You believe that customer loyalty can't be bought, but that it can be rented at reasonable terms and rates.
5	Your habit of constantly telling other people how they can improve makes you a master of performance reviews.
6	You've always believed that the customer is satisfied when you say the customer is satisfied, and not a second before.
7	You love the joy that other people get when you tell them what to do.
8	Buzzwords was your first language.

Franchise Tasks and Downtime

As talked about in the *Player's Handbook* and the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, downtime activities allow players and DMs to make the breaks between adventures into a compelling part of the campaign. In between the highlights of slogging through dungeons, infiltrating death cults, and being generally heroic, characters can practice professions, engage in research, create special items, and indulge other activities beyond adventuring.

Because an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign is focused on the franchise, downtime is typically a big part of the game. (The adventure that makes up chapter 4 of this book, "The Orrery of the Wanderer," sets up downtime options between adventure episodes as a key component of the campaign.) But an Acq Inc campaign offers even more robust options for characters who want to get things done outside adventuring time, because the heroes of an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign have something that most adventurers don't—a well-paid (okay, an occasionally paid) staff.

In addition to the downtime activities characters undertake on their own, the hard-working subemployees and interns of a franchise can carry out orders and further the characters' goals through research, crafting, social encounters, and so forth. This lets the players direct behind-the-scenes activities even as the characters focus

on the more rarefied pursuits of killing monsters and taking their stuff. Before your party sets out for the Fortress of Eternal Peril, an intern can be sent to research that magic book found in a previous adventure. Your majordomo might spend time currying favor with nobles as a means of expanding the franchise's reputation. And what could be more fun (for you) than to have the staff engage in a bit of dangerous criminal activity? If they're successful, the franchise gets the profits! And if they get caught, who are these people you barely know?

Franchise Tasks in the Campaign

By allowing franchise tasks to take place not just during downtime but while the characters are adventuring, it's possible for players in an Acquisitions Incorporated game to try to push the pace of the campaign. Characters might try to avoid taking downtime of their own in favor of having franchise employees take care of all that boring not-adventuring stuff. But because an Acq Inc campaign makes great use of social encounters, research, and intrigue, players should be encouraged to not treat downtime as optional. Moreover, DMs can and will make use of rivalries and complications during franchise tasks to drag characters into that part of the game.

Between Adventures

Using the traditional approach to downtime, franchise tasks can be run at set break points during the campaign. When the characters return from adventuring, they take on some of the responsibility for bookkeeping, maintenance, long-term planning, and the like, making franchise staff available for other activities under the characters' guidance. In this model, characters and staff run downtime simultaneously between sessions of adventuring. This follows the standard approach of using downtime to advance the timeline of the campaign.

Ongoing Activities

A more wide-open approach to franchise tasks sees the characters direct those activities at any point during the campaign, alongside traditional adventuring. During any game session, the players can decide to focus on what the franchise staff are up to by setting assignments, giving orders, and making checks to determine the success of franchise tasks. If those tasks tie strongly into the adventure, franchise tasks can effectively become a fourth pillar of an Acquisitions Incorporated game, alongside exploration, social interaction, and combat.

Selecting Franchise Tasks

Whether franchise tasks are undertaken during regular downtime or alongside other adventuring activities, a franchise's rank puts a hard limit on the number of tasks the franchise's staff can undertake. See the "Franchise Advancement" section earlier in this chapter. (This limit is only for franchise tasks undertaken by staff. The characters are free to undertake whatever downtime activities the DM allows, as normal.)

For each available franchise task slot, players can allocate one or more staff members to a chosen franchise task. Those tasks can include any of the downtime activities in the *Player's Handbook* or the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the new and revised downtime activities in *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*, and the new activities in this section. When all of a franchise's task slots are filled, one of those tasks must be completed before staff can be allocated to a new franchise task. (The one exception to this rule is the running a franchise activity, presented later in this section. That activity must be performed by a franchise, but does not require that specific characters or staff members be allocated to it.)

Staff allocated to a franchise task are no longer available for other needs, including other franchise tasks. Any costs or resources associated with a franchise task must be provided by the franchise (which is to say, by the characters).

For example, a rank 2 franchise can undertake two concurrent franchise tasks. If the characters are setting out to explore the Swamp of Lingering Malaise, they might order their majordomo to send messages to various noble families while they're away, carrying out the sowing rumors activity from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The task follows the regular rules for that downtime activity, but is carried out by the majordomo. At the same time, the characters might send out another staff member to engage in the explore territory activity (a new activity detailed below).

> You can't expect to get everything done yourself. Delegation is key. And the consequences for fumbling a simple task should be real, immediate, and serve as a lesson to others who serve you. No dessert for a tenday! That'll teach 'em.
>
> —Rosie Beestinger

Making Task Checks

When a franchise task requires an ability check, a staff member can use their own ability check modifier to determine success. (This modifier might depend on the staff member's statistics, if an NPC, or it might be based on the franchise's rank. See the "Franchise Advancement" section.) Alternatively, the staff member can use the check modifier of a character overseeing the task and giving the staff member direction. This can encourage the characters to develop closer relationships with franchise staff through roleplaying, and keeps the players involved in staff-focused franchise tasks.

Franchise Tasks as Narrative

Franchise tasks can be an exciting, story-rich part of a gaming session. Over time, franchise tasks and character downtime activities can expand the story of a franchise and add depth to the characterizations of its NPC staff members. The successes, failures, and complications of franchise tasks might even become pivotal moments in the campaign.

As with all aspects of an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, franchise tasks are about creating narrative. As such, to make those tasks a part of the campaign story, the DM and the players can work together to break tasks down into distinct scenes using the following guidelines.

Establish Goals

When the characters select a franchise task, the players share their goals for that task with the DM. Having clear motives helps establish the stakes and provides ideas that the DM can weave into the campaign story. The DM might work up a narrative based on the players' initial discussions, and might ask additional questions to help narrow down options.

As an example, consider a group of characters whose franchise headquarters is a submersible ship, and whose staff are largely former pirates. While the characters head out for a mission on the mainland, they direct the ship's staff-member captain to surprise other vessels and liberate goods from them. The DM decides that such acts of piracy fit the shady business practice activity (introduced later in this section), and quickly sketches out a few ideas for the task.

Opening Scene

The DM describes the beginning of the task activity, setting the stage for the NPCs' actions. For the submersible headquarters discussed above, the DM might begin to describe how the ship leaves port in search of easy prey. The captain and crew are in a good mood. There's a storm in the area, but it doesn't threaten the submersible. The DM might ask the players to describe a few undertakings the crew can engage in to pass the time, or might even ask players to temporarily take on the roles of one or more staff members, helping to bring those NPCs to life through roleplaying.

Ability Check Scenes

For each ability check required by a franchise task, the DM describes what's happening, determines the applicable ability, and decides whether a skill or tool proficiency is appropriate (usually as suggested in the activity write-up). Whether the check is made by a staff member or the character who directed or set up the franchise task, a player makes the roll. The DM can encourage roleplaying by asking about what kind of guidance a character provided to the staff member, or what part of the staff member's background makes them good at the task at hand. The DM then describes successive scenes based on checks and roleplaying as the crew members locate a likely target ship and commence their attack.

Concluding Scene

The DM determines the overall outcome for the franchise task, then narrates the outcome to wrap up that small part of the overall story. If the check for the activity indicates any degree of success, the DM describes how the franchise's pirates manage to grab some valuable cargo, in addition to other benefits as noted in the write-up for the shady business practice activity. With treasure aboard, the ship is ready for the characters' eventual return.

Ongoing Story

Rather than treating franchise tasks as isolated episodes, the DM can weave the story of one task into the next, and can tie franchise tasks into the overarching campaign. Doing so assigns importance to franchise tasks, and lets the players understand how the success or failure of those tasks might drive the campaign. Even after a specific franchise task has concluded, the DM can make notes for how that task might tie to future tasks. For the characters running the submersible franchise, the ship that fought off the franchise's pirates might remember a few details about the franchise crew. Or perhaps the plundered vessel belongs to a franchise rival, or even a foreign dignitary the characters will eventually meet, setting up a future plot twist.

Downtime Activities

This section introduces the following new downtime activities, all of which can be used as franchise tasks in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign: explore territory, franchise restructuring, headquarters modification, marketeering, philanthropic enterprise, running a franchise, scrutineering, shady business practice, schmoozing, team building.

Other downtime activities can be found in the following books:

Player's Handbook (chapter 8): Crafting, practicing a profession, recuperating, research, training

Dungeon Master's Guide (chapter 6): Building a stronghold, carousing, crafting a magic item, gaining renown, performing sacred rites, running a business, selling magic items, sowing rumors, training to gain levels

Xanathar's Guide to Everything (chapter 2): Buying a magic item, carousing, crafting an item, crime, gambling, pit fighting, relaxation, religious service, research, scribing a *spell scroll*, selling a magic item, training, work

Complications and Rivals

The franchise and downtime activities introduced in this section all incorporate the idea that such activities can introduce ongoing complications to the campaign, and that anything a franchise's characters or employees do might bring the franchise into conflict with rivals.

If you use *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* in your games, you're probably already familiar with complications and rivals as part of downtime, but you don't need to own that book to make use of these ideas. Rather, just remember that an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign is always about story. Each time the characters engage in downtime or direct their staff in a franchise task, the players and the DM can think about how those tasks and activities might complicate the ongoing campaign narrative, and how the franchise's enemies—or potential enemies—might get caught up in those complications.

When a complication or a rival comes into play during downtime or franchise activities, the DM determines the particulars. The activities presented at the end of this section all come with tables of possible complications, but the DM is free to come up with even more dastardly complications to suit the campaign.

Who's Watching?

An easy way to focus on complications and rivals in a campaign is to think about who might be paying attention to a franchise's activities. For example, a successful philanthropic enterprise (one of the new activities in this section) could draw the attention of a noble who begins to question the reputation and honesty of the characters running the franchise. Or the party might launch a marketeering campaign (another new activity), only to discover that their branding has an accidental resemblance to the logo of an assassins' guild. Complications are an excellent way to develop rich interactions between the setting and the characters. In an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, even the smallest actions can have unexpected (and, ideally, hilarious) consequences.

Rivals represent any of the factions and organizations that can come into play during an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign. Rivals don't have to be villains or mortal enemies of the characters, though. Other Acq Inc franchises all compete with the characters' franchise, seeking to expand their own reach and impress Head Office. Governments, merchants, guilds, religious institutions, and noble families can all take notice as a franchise grows in power. And outside the characters' immediate sphere of influence, factions such as Dran Enterprises and the Six work dark plots that might make the characters targets for assimilation or destruction. (The plots of the Six and the operations of Dran Enterprises both play a part in the adventure "The Orrery of the Wanderer," chapter 4 of this book.)

When a complication occurs during a downtime or franchise activity, the DM determines whether and how that complication connects to a rival. Certain complications might be caused by rivals, as when the orc army camping in the characters' territory is revealed to have been invited there by a competing franchise. Other complications might draw a rival in, as when a greedy noble decides they want a piece of the franchise's action.

Rival NPCs can be worked up using the rules in chapter 4, "Creating Nonplayer Characters," of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, incorporating schemes, methods, and weaknesses. If you use *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* in your game, that book provides example rivals and talks about establishing a rival's goals, assets, and plans. See also the "Factions and Rivals" section in chapter 3 of this book for an introduction to some of the rival organizations that might appear in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign.

Complications as Story

Complications and rivals make excellent adventure seeds. Whenever a complication or rival draws the interest of the players, the DM can make a note of that for future development. As the campaign progresses, the agendas of rivals change over time, just as the characters' goals and agendas change as a result of their franchise's success (or their efforts to stave off failure).

The DM can decide how to invoke complications as the campaign story unfolds. Perhaps the characters were forced to slay an evil guard in a raid gone bad. Later, their majordomo engages in a little gambling as part of a franchise task ... and finds the suspicious husband of the guard at their gaming table! Likewise, if a franchise has recently tangled with Dran Enterprises or opposed another Acq Inc franchise, the chance of a complication with either group likely goes up.

Downtime and Franchise Activities

In addition to the downtime activities found in other books, characters and their franchise staff can undertake the new activities presented in this section, either as regular downtime activities or as franchise tasks that can be undertaken at any time. These activities reflect the central role of the franchise in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign.

The length of time required for these new downtime or franchise activities varies, from a number of days to one workweek (5 days) or more. All the normal rules for downtime must be followed by the character or NPC undertaking the downtime or franchise activity, including spending 8 hours each day engaged in that activity for the day to count toward the activity's completion. The one exception to this rule is that any costs for a franchise activity are paid for by the characters, even if franchise staff are executing the task.

Some downtime and franchise activities alter a franchise's monthly costs. See the "Franchise Advancement" section earlier in this chapter for how to determine a franchise's base monthly costs, and see the "Running a Franchise" section below for more information on how that activity modifies the base cost.

Explore Territory

No matter how densely populated or remote and wild the territory in which a franchise is licensed to operate, that territory has secrets. Characters and franchise staff can explore their licensed territory in search of useful features, hidden lairs, resources, and creatures that can be engaged in beneficial service. (Or, you know, sold for parts. If you're okay with that). Exploration can be done any number of times in a franchise's territory, representing new areas being explored, new discoveries, or elements that have changed since the last exploration.

Resources. Exploring a portion of a licensed territory requires at least one workweek of effort and incurs 200 gp per franchise rank in expenses. Spending more time and money increases the chance that the expedition finds something of use to the franchise.

Resolution. A character or staff member directing the expedition makes a Wisdom (Survival) check to determine the outcome. This check gains a +2 bonus if a character with the cartographer or occultant position is part of the expedition, a +1 bonus for each workweek beyond the first that is spent exploring, and a +1 bonus for every additional 200 gp spent over the baseline expenses. A maximum bonus of +10 can be applied to this check. The total of the check determines the outcome, as shown on the Exploration Discoveries table.

Exploration Discoveries

Check Total	Discovery
1–5	Major threat*
6–10	Minor threat*
11–15	No discovery of note
16–20	Natural feature
21–25	New customers
26–30	Ally or useful monster
31+	Expanded benefit

*Might involve a rival

Major Threat. A result on the table indicating a major threat represents a discovery, event, or entity that might completely undo a franchise's ability to do business—or destroy it altogether. Such threats might include the discovery of a massing orc tribe, or a dragon entering the area to raid the franchise's trade routes. The franchise's monthly costs increase by 50 percent until the threat is resolved, as determined by the DM.

Minor Threat. A minor threat to the franchise involves uncovering a danger that can disrupt the characters' ability to conduct business effectively. Such threats might arise from stumbling upon the lair of a monster, learning of the machinations of a noble, or discovering a rival's outpost. The franchise's monthly costs increase by 25 percent until the threat is resolved, as determined by the DM.

Natural Feature. The expedition could locate timber, precious metals, or other valuable natural resources; a feature that serves as a lookout or offers defensive value; a location that can serve as a safe house; or the like. Valuable resources lower a franchise's monthly costs by 25 percent for 1d4 + 1 months. Other natural features can offer material benefits in future gaming sessions. For example, a tall spire of rock could serve as a watchtower, allowing the franchise to gain advance warning of any large-scale forces moving through their territory. A cave network acting as a safe house could allow the franchise to conceal goods or people in times of trouble.

New Customers. A new settlement is discovered in the territory, and the people there are eager to deal. These could be newcomers settling the area or a previously unnoticed village or group of farmsteads. The presence of new customers lowers franchise costs by 25 percent for 2d4 months before rivals catch wind of them.

Ally or Useful Monster. The dwelling of a useful ally, such as a sage or a former franchise member, is discovered. This ally can become a source of lore, providing insights into one or more campaign secrets—for a low, low fee of 100 gp times the franchise tier for each secret. The party can also make one-time use of the ally to lower franchise costs by 50 percent for 1d4 months, after which the ally departs.

The expedition could instead locate a monster that is either willing to help the party or can be tamed. The challenge rating of the monster is typically equal to franchise rank, and providing for the monster's needs costs 100 gp per month. This monster could serve as a scout or spy, alerting the franchise to danger in its territory. Or it could serve as a mount or guardian and be based in the franchise headquarters. Such a monster remains with the franchise as long as its costs are covered and it is treated well.

Expanded Benefit. The DM chooses whether the expedition turns up a natural feature, new customers, or an ally or useful monster, then increases the benefit or reduces the cost of that discovery. Natural resources might be found in greater abundance, an ally might provide secrets for half the normal fee, a monster might be of a higher challenge rating than normal, and so on.

Complications. A result of 1–10 on the Exploration Discoveries table is its own complication, but the DM can add unexpected side effects to a successful result by choosing from or rolling on the Explore Territory Complications table.

Explore Territory Complications

d6	Complication
1	Within 1 month, the characters find legal documents indicating the beneficial element is owned by or sworn to serve someone else.*
2	One or more staff members go missing during the exploration activity. Their fate is a mystery the characters must resolve.*
3	The beneficial element has a nefarious past, bears a curse, or comes with a dark secret.
4	The beneficial element is short-lived, ending with little notice. Allies might suddenly leave, or a natural feature could be destroyed by a storm.
5	Outsiders are drawn to the beneficial element, getting in the way of the franchise's operations.*
6	Bad luck seems to follow anyone interacting with the beneficial element.

*Might involve a rival

Franchise Restructuring

A growing franchise often needs fine-tuning to improve its operations and remain lean and capable. Efficiency measures, bold new paradigms, shiny business plans, internal audits, and inventory management can be key to new profits. The best plans often end up creating an auxiliary market for "how-to" books, such as *Can't-Miss Principles of Franchise Reinvisionary Strategery* and *What to Inquire about How to Acquire*. In some campaigns, Head Office might periodically require this task to ensure that a franchise grows effectively.

Resources. Boldly restructuring a franchise requires at least two workweeks of effort. The franchise must also spend 100 gp per franchise rank in expenses. Spending more time and money increases the characters' chance to effectively restructure their franchise.

Resolution. Characters or staff members in charge of the restructuring make two ability checks with a DC of 13 + franchise rank. First, a character or staff member must succeed at either an Intelligence (History) or Wisdom (Insight) check to select the right vision or identify the right areas to innovate. This check gains a +1 bonus for every character with the loremonger or hoardsperson position in the franchise, and an additional +1 bonus if the character making the check has one of those positions.

A character or staff member must then make a Charisma (Deception, Performance, or Persuasion) check to get all other characters and staff on board with the prescribed changes. This check gains a +1 bonus for each decisionist or secretarian in the franchise, and an additional +1 bonus if the character making the check has one of those positions.

All checks gain a +1 bonus for every two workweeks beyond the initial time that is spent undertaking this activity. Each check also gains a +1 bonus for every additional 100 gp spent over the baseline expenses. A maximum bonus of +10 can be applied to each check.

The total number of successes determines the outcome of the activity, as noted on the Franchise Restructuring table.

Franchise Restructuring

Successes	Benefit
0	The restructuring plan is a failure. The franchise's monthly costs increase by 20 percent for 1 month.
1	The restructuring plan provides minor benefits. The franchise's monthly costs decrease by 10 percent for 1d4 months.
2	The restructuring plan provides strong benefits. The franchise's monthly costs decrease by 20 percent for 1d4 months.

Complications. A result of 0 successes typically indicates that the failed restructuring results in a complication. At the DM's discretion, even a successful outcome might have unexpected side effects. The DM can choose a complication or roll on the Franchise Restructuring Complications table.

Franchise Restructuring Complications

d6	Complication
1	The restructuring plan has too many buzzwords and acronyms. The resulting confusion sees shipments or staff sent to dangerous locations. A side trek adventure is required to recover the lost goods or personnel.
2	The changes to the franchise alienate an important staff member, who takes one of the franchise's best practices or secrets to a rival.*
3	The search for efficiency uncovers a previously unrecognized issue, such as corruption, problems with staff dynamics, or influence from a rival.*
4	An audit reveals that one of the staff members was a spy, feeding secrets to a rival. The spy escapes, possibly inspiring a side trek adventure to catch them.*
5	The restructuring efforts produce lingering chaos. The next two times a check is made for a downtime or franchise activity in the campaign, the check is made with disadvantage.
6	A staff member becomes outraged by the changes and secretly begins to undermine the franchise. The characters must uncover the culprit and decide how to deal with them.*

*Might involve a rival

Headquarters Modification

Major headquarters modifications are made as a regular part of franchise advancement (see "Franchise Advancement" earlier in this chapter). But it's sometimes desirable to update a previous modification in ways that don't provide any additional mechanical benefits.

Characters and franchise staff members can use this activity to modify an existing headquarters feature. This change is subject to DM approval, and is typically done within the same feature category, such as swapping one weapon option for another. In response to pressing need, the DM might allow a franchise to swap options between categories, such as losing a weapon option in favor of an arcane option. The DM can limit how often this activity is used.

Resources. Once a modification is approved, this activity requires the involvement of the franchise's majordomo and at least one other character or staff member. This team must dedicate at least three workweeks to this activity, and the franchise must spend 1,000 gp per franchise rank to cover expenses. The DM might also require a side trek to gather necessary materials or hire specialist labor before the activity can be commenced.

Resolution. One character or the majordomo acts as the lead for this activity, making an Intelligence (Arcana or History) check to draft the modifications. A character or the majordomo must then make two ability checks to complete the modifications, using either Strength (Athletics) or an Intelligence check using appropriate tools. With DM approval, a different ability and skill appropriate for the modification can be substituted for any of the checks.

Each check receives a +1 bonus for every two staff participating who are skilled hirelings, and a +1 bonus if any participant has the cartographer, loremonger, or hoardsperson position. The number of successes is compared to the Headquarters Modification table.

Headquarters Modification

Successes	Benefit
0	The modification fails, and the franchise incurs cost overruns of 1,000 gp per franchise rank.
1	The modification fails, and the franchise incurs cost overruns of 500 gp per franchise rank. However, the cause of the failure is apparent, granting advantage on any future checks to perform the same modification.
2	The modification succeeds but incurs a cost overrun of 100 gp per franchise rank. The modification also has a minor drawback, as determined by the DM.
3	The modification succeeds with no cost overruns or drawbacks.

Complications. A result of 0 successes or 1 success automatically creates a complication. Other results might create a complication at the DM's determination. The DM can select a complication or roll on the Headquarters Modification Complications table.

Headquarters Modification Complications

d6	Complication
1	An accident during the modification injures a franchise staff member. That NPC's family demands compensation equal to 100 gp per franchise rank. It might be possible to instead appease the family by performing a service.
2	A spy makes a copy of the plans for the modification, learning its function and taking that information back to a rival organization.*
3	The modification was based on information originating with a rival. If the modification failed, the plans were intentionally faulty. If it succeeded, the characters detected the fault, but must decide how to respond to the attempted sabotage.*
4	A local official insists that permits were needed for the modification, and demands payment or a favor to make the problem go away.*
5	The work causes the franchise headquarters to develop a quirk, such as strange noises, unwelcome smells, weird vibrations while mobile, and the like. Resolving the problem might require consulting a sage or an expert in headquarters construction.
6	The modification work uncovers a previously unknown problem with the headquarters, such as a structural defect, a dormant monster, bodies interred in the foundations, a concealed cursed item, and so forth.

*Might involve a rival

Marketeering

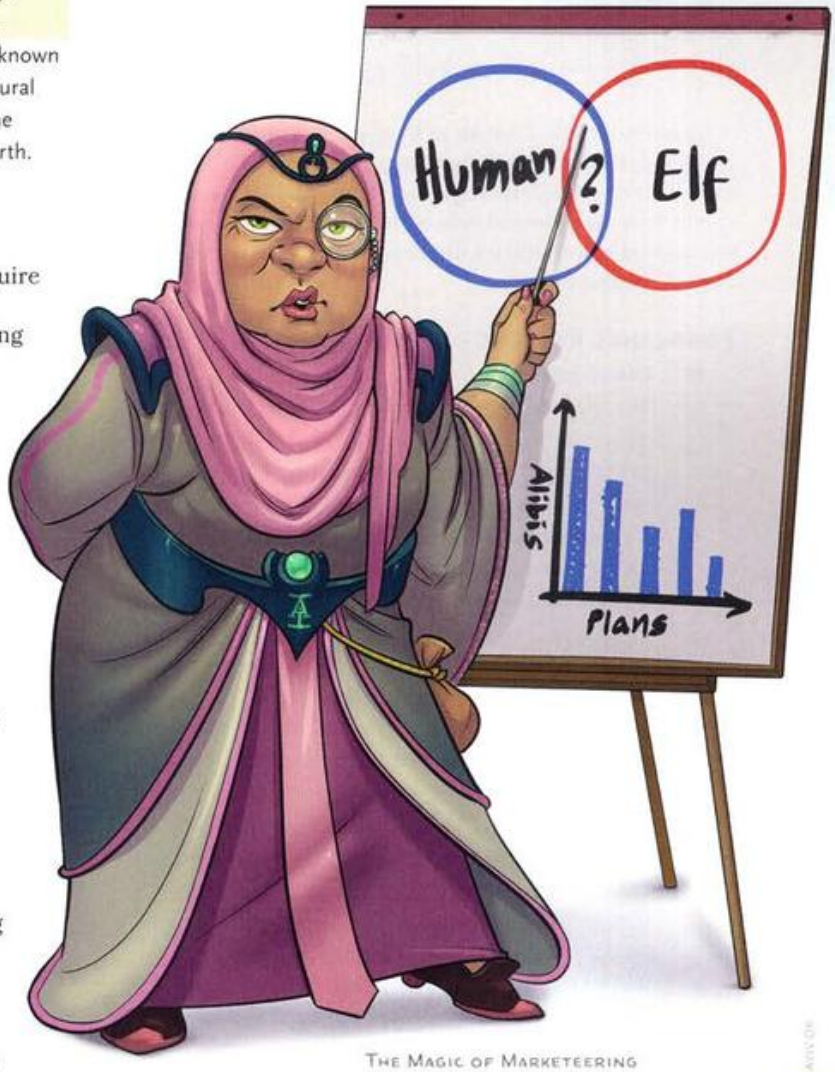
Every successful franchise knows that brands require constant management. Developing new markets, shaping catchy slogans, and surveying and engaging customers can all create new sources of revenue. Should you write and sell exciting chapbook serials based on the exploits of Omin, Jim, Môrgæn, and Viari? Should you sell a complex investment scheme to a city's guild masters? Should you create a branded stage production based on your franchise's exciting adventures, with a line of clothing to match? All those things and more are encompassed by the fine art of marketeering.

Resources. The players must first sketch out their marketeering plan and present it to the DM. A character or franchise staff member must spend at least one workweek to engage in marketeering, and must spend 100 gp per franchise rank in expenses. Spending more money increases the chance of the plan's success.

Resolution. A marketeering effort requires three ability checks, representing drafting the campaign, launching the campaign, and managing its success. Any of the characters or staff members involved in the marketeering can make a check. The DM decides which abilities and skills are applicable, based on the marketeering plan. For example, a plan involving selling a new line of religious items might require an Intelligence (Religion) check to draft the idea and develop the products, a Charisma (Deception) check to convince local temples to promote the idea, and a Charisma (Persuasion) check to ensure the plan receives continued support.

Each check gains a +1 bonus for each additional 100 gp per franchise rank spent above the baseline expenses. When additional gold is spent, the character making the checks determines which checks the bonuses apply to. Additional gold can be spent at any point in the process, allowing the franchise to put more effort into subsequent checks if earlier checks are less than successful. If the character making the check has the obviator or secretarian position, they receive an additional +1 bonus to each check. A maximum bonus of +5 can be applied to each check.

The DC of each check is determined randomly, reflecting the always-unpredictable conditions of the market. The DM rolls 2d10 + 5 for the DC, generating a separate result for each check. The total number of successes determines the outcome of the activity, as noted on the Marketeering table.



The Magic of Marketeering

Marketeering

Successes	Benefit
0	The marketeering plan fails. The franchise's monthly costs increase by 20 percent for 1 month.
1	The marketeering plan provides no improvements or setbacks.
2	The marketeering plan provides moderate benefits. The franchise's monthly costs decrease by 25 percent for 1 month.
3	The marketeering plan is a complete success. The franchise's monthly costs decrease by 25 percent for 2 months.

Complications. A result of 0 successes or 1 success typically indicates that the marketeering plan incurs a complication. However, even a successful result can trigger a complication at the DM's determination. The DM can choose a complication or roll on the Marketeering Complications table.

Marketeering Complications

d8	Complication
1	The marketeering plan attracts the attention of Head Office, where someone absolutely hates it. A NPC is sent to oversee the franchise "for a while," with an outcome determined by the DM.*
2	Marketeering materials go missing right before launch, forcing the franchise to recreate them at the last minute. This might incur additional baseline costs or affect the reduction of franchise costs, as the DM determines.*
3	Just as the marketeering plan is released to the public, the characters realize that a competing group released a surprisingly similar plan just a tenday previous. Customers now think the franchise is copying its rival.*
4	The marketeering's message alienates or offends a crucial demographic. Protests spring up, and the affected group demands reparations.
5	A local official or noble begins to look into claims of deceptive advertising tactics or questionable hiring practices related to the marketeering plan.*
6	The marketeering plan creates great interest—but unfortunately steers customers toward similar products or services offered by a competitor.*
7	The catchphrase or theme song of the marketeering campaign is a surprise hit, and everyone repeats it endlessly! Until they tire of it and begin blaming the franchise for mental trauma.
8	The marketeering plan is undermined by rumors of a problem with the product or service, causing it to be dangerous to anyone using it.*

*Might involve a rival

Philanthropic Enterprise

It can feel great to give to charity and help those in need. Pretending to care about others can also be a great way to earn favor with governments and nobility, gain tax write-offs, or win over customers. Head Office might suggest (or even require) that a franchise undertake this activity if it has recently gained negative publicity or been discovered to engage in shady activities.

Franchise members should select a philanthropic cause related to a nearby area, settlement, or group of people. Example causes include such efforts as picking up trash from roads or forests, improving schools, and raising funds for victims of a recent disaster. (That last one is an especially good idea if the disaster was caused by the franchise). Success benefits the franchise by helping the selected cause—or at least giving the appearance of having done so. Failure might worsen both the underlying issue and the franchise's reputation.

Resources. The philanthropic exercise activity requires at least one workweek of effort, and incurs 50 gp per franchise rank in expenses.

Resolution. One character or staff member involved in the philanthropic enterprise makes an ability check determined by the DM. A Charisma check using the character's choice of skill is often appropriate, but the DM might decide that a specific philanthropic approach requires a different ability and skill. A character with the documancer or occultant position gains a +1 bonus to the check. The total of the check determines the outcome, as shown on the Philanthropic Enterprise table.

Philanthropic Enterprise

Check Total	Result
1–5	The philanthropic enterprise is a disaster. The cause is left severely worse off, and literally everyone blames the franchise.
6–10	The cause shows no real improvement, and people are slow to accept the franchise's claims of wanting to help.
11–15	The franchise is praised for its help in improving the chosen cause. Donations to the cause pour in, allowing the franchise to skim an honorarium of 200 gp.
16–20	The cause shows serious improvement, and the franchise is heralded for its actions. Donations to the cause pour in, allowing the franchise to skim a management fee of 500 gp.
21+	The cause shows remarkable improvement, and the franchise is credited for all but fully resolving the issue. Local officials provide a tax break, reducing the franchise's monthly costs by 20 percent for 2 months.

Complications. A result of 1–5 on the Philanthropic Enterprise table automatically generates a complication. But the DM can decide that even success might have drawbacks, either choosing or rolling for a complication on the Philanthropic Enterprise Complications table.

People give away their money? For no reason? But how will they buy ale and arrows?

—Môrgæn

Philanthropic Enterprise Complications

d6	Complication
1	The selected cause is secretly the purview of a thieves' guild or other criminal organization. The organization resents the franchise's efforts and decides to undermine the characters' future endeavors.*
2	A local reporter or official becomes convinced that the franchise's efforts are all about the characters' personal gain. The individual begins to monitor the franchise, and reports on any missteps.*
3	A group of individuals objects to the franchise's efforts, believing that the problem underlying the selected cause is part of the natural order. The group actively tries to convince others of the terrible side effects (real or otherwise) of the franchise's philanthropy.*
4	Another philanthropic group is already involved in the franchise's cause. That group tries to cast the franchise's efforts as ineffective and insincere.*
5	Hearing of the franchise's good works, people who are affected by some other issue requiring philanthropic assistance show up at franchise headquarters in huge numbers.
6	Members of the franchise work with an established group to perform the philanthropic enterprise. But it soon becomes clear that the group is a sham—and that local officials are looking into their activities. The characters need to fix the situation, or risk being implicated in scandal by association.*

*Might involve a rival

Running a Franchise

Running a business is one of the downtime activities presented in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, but an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise is no mere business. This new downtime and franchise activity covers the many and varied duties necessary to keep a franchise running smoothly, and determines how well the characters and their staff manage those duties.

Resources. Unless the DM decides otherwise, this franchise task must be run at the end of each month of game time. Unlike other activities, results are determined for running a franchise even if specific characters and staff members are not allocated to the activity. However, allocating characters or staff members to running the franchise greatly improves the chances for a favorable outcome.

During any given month, the players decide how many days their characters and the franchise staff can dedicate to this activity. Characters and staff members cannot perform other activities while focused on this activity (as normal), and any days spent adventuring or engaged in other activities cannot be used for this activity.

Resolution. Percentile dice are rolled by a player nominated for this task by the group. The number of total days spent by all characters and staff members on this activity are added to the roll. That total is then compared to the Running a Franchise table to determine what happens for the month.

Running a Franchise

d100 + Days	Result
01–10	The franchise has a ruinous month. Declining sales and rising expenditures increase the franchise's monthly cost by 150 percent.
11–20	The franchise suffers severe setbacks. Monthly cost increases by 125 percent.
21–30	The franchise struggles. Monthly cost increases by 100 percent.
31–40	The franchise performs poorly. Monthly cost increases by 50 percent.
41–50	The franchise operates normally. Monthly cost does not change.
51–60	The franchise sees strong sales and trims expenses. Monthly cost decreases by 50 percent.
61–70	The franchise improves operations and sales. Monthly cost decreases by 100 percent.
71–80	The franchise has an excellent month. Monthly cost decreases by 110 percent.
81–90	The franchise has a fantastic month. Monthly cost decreases by 125 percent.
91+	The franchise is a shining example to other Acquisitions Incorporated franchises. Monthly cost decreases by 150 percent.

Determining Monthly Cost. A franchise's base monthly cost is a combination of the cost for the franchise's headquarters and a multiplier for franchise rank. The fancier the headquarters, the more the upkeep. And the bigger the franchise, the more overhead it has. The "Franchise Advancement" section earlier in this chapter has more information on determining a franchise's base monthly cost.

Whenever a downtime or franchise activity modifies a franchise's costs for a given month, that increase or decrease is totaled up with all other increases and decreases. For example, a successful marketeering campaign might decrease the franchise's monthly costs by 25 percent, but then a major threat as a result of exploring franchise territory increases monthly costs by 50 percent—a net increase of 25 percent.

Whenever the final result indicates that the franchise's monthly costs have decreased 100 percent, profits and expenses exactly balance each other out, so that the franchise has no payment to make for that month. Whenever the final total is a decrease in monthly costs of more than 100 percent, this means the franchise has paid its expenses and earned a profit to boot. Calculate the profit based on the amount of the decrease above 100 percent. For example, a franchise whose monthly costs come out at a decrease of 150 percent earns a profit equal to 50 percent of the franchise's base monthly cost.

Nonpayment Penalties. At the end of this activity, the franchise makes a payment to Head Office to cover its monthly costs. If it does not do so, the franchise begins to fail. See the rules for defaulting in the "Franchise Costs" section, earlier in this chapter. Regardless of what action Head Office takes, a franchise's inability

to pay its expenses should result in complications and story ramifications. Local folk and businesses start to demand that accounts be cleared. The general public might begin to reject the franchise's products and services, worried about dealing with dodgy businesspeople.

Complications. A franchise automatically suffers a complication if the check for this activity was 30 or less. The DM might also impose a complication even when a franchise is doing well. The DM can choose a complication or roll on the Running a Franchise Complications table.

Running a Franchise Complications

d6	Complication
1	The franchise's sales of products and services have attracted competition from a rival.*
2	Regardless of its success month to month, the franchise's long-term planning is called into question. Head Office demands that the characters engage in either the franchise restructuring activity or the team building activity.
3	A person who insists they are in no way from Head Office suggests that the franchise should run the shady business practice activity. It really feels more like a demand than a suggestion.
4	Customers are turning away from the franchise. Until the characters can determine the cause, each subsequent check for the running a franchise activity takes a –5 penalty.*
5	A staff member finds signs of sabotage impacting the franchise's operations.*
6	Staff members start demanding higher pay and threaten to go on strike.*

*Might involve a rival

Scrutineering

As a member of an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise, you scoff at those who limit their intelligence-gathering activities to mere research or sagery. The scrutineering activity covers basic research easily enough (finding a new profitable venture, learning what pleases Head Office, amassing lore about a site or monster, and so forth). But it can also expand across a much broader range of activities. You might engage ("kidnap" is such a harsh word) members of a rival group, learn the secrets of a stronghold known only to those who built it, assess an organization's business model to determine its weaknesses, or lay rightful claim to any information that might benefit your franchise in some way.

Resources. The DM determines what resources are required for any particular scrutineering goal, including access to specific people or places. Once that access has been gained, this activity requires at least one workweek of effort and 100 gp per franchise rank spent on bribes, materials, and other expenses. Spending more money increases the chance for successful scrutineering.

Resolution. The character or staff member overseeing the activity makes an Intelligence check, and can make use of a skill appropriate to the scrutineering activity at the DM's discretion. This check gains a +1 bonus per 100 gp spent beyond the baseline expenses. A character with the documancer position gains a +1 bonus to the check. A maximum bonus of +10 can be applied to this check. The total of the check determines the outcome, as shown on the Scrutineering table.

Scrutineering

Check Total	Outcome
1–5	No effect.
6–10	You learn one piece of lore.
11–20	You learn two pieces of lore.
21+	You learn three pieces of lore.

Each piece of lore you uncover through scrutineering might cover specific details about a creature or NPC, how to thwart the defenses of a stronghold or office, the rituals or magic items employed by a mystical order, and so forth. The DM makes the final decision regarding what information is revealed by scrutineering.

Complications. Whenever this activity is undertaken, the DM determines whether a complication is warranted. Even if the information you uncover with scrutineering is accurate, additional things you didn't learn might complicate your understanding. Your attempts to uncover secret information might also be thwarted by those intent on keeping those secrets. The DM can choose a complication or roll on the Scrutineering Complications table.

Scrutineering Complications

d6	Complication
1	One of the pieces of information is false and was planted by a rival.*
2	A source of information decides to join a rival organization, becoming an asset for them.*
3	A source was a greedy information broker, who decides to also sell information about the franchise or Head Office to a rival organization.*
4	The target of the information becomes aware of the franchise's scrutineering efforts, and resents them.*
5	Scrutineering attempts attract the attention of officials, nobles, or another faction or rival who were previously unaware of the franchise.*
6	The character or staff member leading the activity comes into contact with a magical effect whose removal might require a side trek adventure.

*Might involve a rival

Shady Business Practice

The quickest path to success often runs straight through the thickets of questionable legality. Franchises that can overcome the morally dubious aspects of certain enterprises—and can deal with the risk of being caught engaging in those enterprises—might wish to consider such time-honored practices as back-of-the-wagon discount sales, fly-by-night gambling halls, highway robbery, racketeering, and pyramid schemes. Shady business practices can also include corporate espionage against rivals and other Acq Inc franchises, including stealing goods or sabotaging commercial efforts.

> Why would I know anything about shady business practices? Why are you asking me? I'm sure I don't know what you mean. Plausible deniability certainly is not an important business tip I'd recommend.
>
> —Rosie Beestinger

Resources. An intended shady business practice is detailed by the players and approved by the DM. Any shady business practice requires at least two work-weeks of effort, plus 50 gp per franchise rank in expenses to set up the scheme.

Resolution. A shady business practice requires three ability checks, reflecting the ongoing progress of the chosen scheme. Any of the characters or staff members involved in the shady business practice can make a check. The abilities and skills applicable for each check are determined by the DM, reflecting the selected scheme and the ongoing narrative. For example, an attempt to set up a fly-by-night casino might require an Intelligence (Investigation) check to case a town for a suitable location, a Wisdom or Charisma check making use of gaming set proficiency to run the operation, and a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to get away with the profits. At the DM's determination, each check gains a +1 bonus if the character making the check has a background appropriate to the shady activity.

The DC of each check is determined randomly, reflecting the risky nature of criminal enterprises. The DM rolls 2d10 + 5 for the DC, generating a separate result for each check. The total number of successes determines the outcome of the activity, as noted on the Shady Business Practice table.

Some outcomes of shady business provide an additional benefit, chosen by the DM and relating to the characters' chosen enterprise. For example, a franchise engaged in corporate espionage might gain insight into a rival, while a franchise selling black-market goods might learn the name of a corrupt government official.

Shady Business Practice

Successes	Benefit
0	All participants in the shady business practice are arrested, and the franchise is fined 250 gp per franchise rank.
1	The shady business practice is a borderline success, providing 50 gp in profits per franchise rank.
2	The shady business practice is a moderate success, providing 100 gp in profits per franchise rank. Additionally, the franchise gains a minor benefit related to the enterprise.
3	The shady business practice is a full success, providing 150 gp in profits per franchise rank. Additionally, the franchise gains a major benefit related to the enterprise.

Complications. Achieving 0 successes automatically generates a complication, but the DM might decide that any illicit enterprise runs the risk of unforeseen circumstances. The DM can choose a complication or roll on the Shady Business Practice Complications table.

Shady Business Practice Complications

d6	Complication
1	One of the franchise's staff members is arrested in connection with the scheme—and is set to be interrogated about all the franchise's activities.*
2	Characters or staff members meet a corrupt official or noble as a result of the scheme. This brash and flamboyant individual threatens to draw attention to any future shady enterprises.
3	A rival uncovers the shady scheme and threatens to expose it.*
4	A citizens group hears rumors about the franchise's involvement in the shady scheme, and forms a watch organization to monitor the characters.
5	An NPC who participated in the scheme tries to blackmail the franchise, asking for payment or a favor to keep quiet.
6	A thieves' guild or other criminal organization takes an interest in the scheme. They order the franchise to run this activity every month, and demand a 10 percent cut. While the franchise does so, all checks for shady business practice activities are made with advantage.*

*Might involve a rival

Schmoozing

The schmoozing activity is more than just random carousing, chatting people up at society parties, or pumping strangers for information over copious drinks. (Full disclosure: copious drinks are often still a part of the bigger schmoozing picture.) For characters in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, schmoozing is a carefully focused engagement of bargaining and influence, designed to harvest contacts important to a franchise's interests.

Resources. Schmoozing covers at least one workweek of interactions. Characters or staff members undertaking this activity must look and play the part of the confident franchisee—dressing well, spending money, giving gifts to new friends, and so forth. Schmoozing with laborers and other working-class folk might incur expenses of 10 gp per franchise rank, with expenses escalating to 100 gp or more per franchise rank for schmoozing professionals and business rivals. Schmoozing at the highest level with nobles or ranking members of a faction might incur expenses of 250 gp or more per franchise rank as the character or staff member attempts to put on an impressive social display.

Resolution. The character or staff member engaging in schmoozing determines whether they want to establish relations with specific NPCs or with any general representative of a group. The character makes a Charisma (Persuasion) check to determine the effectiveness of their schmoozing, as noted on the Schmoozing table. A character with the obviator position gains a +1 bonus to the check. A character with a background related to those they attempt to schmooze gains a +1 bonus to the check (a criminal schmoozing other criminals, a guild artisan schmoozing a guild master, and so forth).

Schmoozing

Check Total	Result
1–5	The character's failed schmoozing brings the franchise into disrepute. Any further checks made for the franchise to schmooze NPCs from the same group or organization are made with disadvantage.
6–10	The character becomes known to those they schmooze, but gains no immediate benefit. If the character undertakes this activity again within the same group or social circle, the next check to schmooze is made with advantage.
11–15	The character successfully establishes the desired contacts, and is treated as a confidante of those they schmoozed.
16–20	The character establishes the desired contacts and is treated as a trusted friend.
21+	The character establishes the desired contacts and gains a favor as a result of their schmoozing skill.

If contacts are successfully made, the DM determines which NPCs the franchise is able to ingratiate itself with, how long those relationships last, and what kinds of benefits the franchise might gain. Some schmoozed NPCs might provide only a single minor benefit to the franchise before realizing the one-sided nature of the relationship. Others might hang around wanting to help the franchise for years—whether the characters want them to or not.

Complications. A check of 5 or lower made to schmooze automatically triggers a complication. Because the stakes of schmoozing are often high, the DM might decide to have any successful schmooze attempt come with a potential downside. The DM can choose a complication or roll on the Schmoozing Complications table.

Schmoozing Complications

d6	Complication
1	A different group notices the character's schmoozing attempts. Agents threaten to expose the franchise's ulterior motives unless the characters perform a favor or pay a bribe.*
2	To win over a potential contact, the schmoozing character or staff member swore to participate in an initiation ritual from the contact's group ... without first learning the nature of that ritual.
3	A contact becomes convinced that the schmoozing character or staff member intends to leave the franchise and join the contact's organization. It's clear that they'll become hurt or angry when they learn the truth.
4	In the attempt to win over a contact, it was necessary to reveal one of the franchise's secrets.*
5	The character or staff member regrets giving a contact a personal item, a drop of blood, or a lock of hair. It seemed like a great idea at the time.*
6	Shortly after schmoozing, the character or staff member receives a love letter from a contact—whether that interest is reciprocated or not.*

*Involves a faction or rival

Team Building

The frenetic pace of adventuring and running a franchise sometimes covers up underlying issues. Has the party's cleric accidentally started worshiping a dark god? Is the majordomo at odds with the occultant's habit of displaying entrails in the great hall? Is the fighter questioning their life choices? The team building activity can help characters work through problems, settle differences, and adjust the work-life balance. In the end, everyone ends up with a healthier working relationship. Or at least that's the plan.

At the DM's determination, characters might be directed by Head Office to run this activity each time a new franchise rank is gained, or during times of exceptional chaos or uncertainty.

Resources. Team building requires the involvement of at least two characters, or a character and a staff member. Those individuals must dedicate at least one workweek to this activity, whose particulars are worked out by participating players and the DM. The team building exercise might be a trust-inspiring ropes course, an emotional "resolve your issues" workshop, a meeting

with an NPC spiritual guide, or any other suitable endeavor. Setting up the exercise incurs expenses of from 50 gp to 250 gp per franchise rank, as determined by the DM.

Resolution. Each character or staff member participating in team building chooses another participant, then creates a negative story connection to a bond, ideal, or similar element of that participant's backstory. The players come up with such connections for their own characters. The DM creates connections for franchise staff, either on their own or in consultation with the players. (Characters and staff members do not need to pair up. If everyone else in the franchise has a particular problem with one character, so be it.)

Each character and staff member then makes a Wisdom (Insight) check. With the DM's approval, different ability checks and skills might be allowed if they relate to the specifics of the team building exercise. A participant has advantage on their check if the DM decides the story connection was particularly clever or well roleplayed. All checks gain a +1 bonus if one of the characters taking part in the activity is a decisionist.

Each check is compared to the Team Building table. The outcome of the check can help redefine the relationships between individual characters, and can establish the tone of roleplaying between characters and franchise staff. Some outcomes also involve a team building memory that provides a potent benefit (see below).

Team Building

Check Total	Benefit
1–5	The participant uncovers deep-seated issues between themself and their chosen partner. If this is a character, they have disadvantage on ability checks made in the presence of the partner until the character undertakes this activity again. If this is a staff member, they are traumatized and leave the franchise unless the characters can convince them to stay.
6–10	The participant did not benefit from the team building exercise, but avoided serious trauma.
11–15	The participant was able to work through one or more issues. If this is a character, they have advantage on the next check they make during a franchise or downtime activity.
16–20	The participant sees themself and their connection to the other participant in a whole new way. If this is a character, they have advantage on the next check they make during a franchise or downtime activity, and they gain a team building memory (see below).
21+	The participant has had an awakening, gaining a deep sense of who they can become and their connection to their partner. The character has advantage on the next check they make during a franchise or downtime activity, and gains two team building memories.

> Wait, we're a team? I thought we were independent entities with temporarily aligned goals.
>
> —Môrgæn

Team Building Memories. The most potent personal changes inspired by team building can last a lifetime. Or at least an encounter. A character who earns a team building memory gains an extraordinary ability that can be used once. As a bonus action, the character gains one effect of the *enhance ability* spell for 10 minutes (no concentration required).

A character can retain team building memories only from the most recent instance of this activity. If a character has unused team building memories and undertakes this activity again, those memories are lost.

Complications. At the DM's determination, every team building exercise has a chance of creating a complication as things get real, yo. The DM can choose a complication or roll on the Team Building Complications table.

Team Building Complications

d6	Complication
1	The team building activity is revealed to actually be a death trap, an island of doom, or a similar challenge. The DM determines whether this was an honest mix-up, the act of a disgruntled staff member, or the actions of a rival.*
2	Upon hearing what took place during the team building exercise, uninvolved staff members decide that the franchise is subjecting them to too much trauma. Some staff members might threaten to quit, or decide they want more benefits.
3	It's revealed that the team building exercise was set up by a rival as an opportunity to ambush the participants, or to attack the franchise headquarters while the characters were away.*
4	The participants learn way too much about each other. Each character participating in the activity must select a bond, ideal, or similar background aspect from their partner and come up with a story explaining how this becomes a conflict for them.
5	Staff members who did not participate in the team building exercise feel left out, and morale drops at the franchise. The characters must find a way to raise staff spirits that does not involve running this activity again.
6	A staff member involved in the activity is secretly a member of a rival organization, or has been duped into doing that organization's bidding. During the team building exercise, the rival organization plans to steal franchise secrets or destroy the participants' morale.*

*Might involve a rival

Chapter 3: Player Options

At Acquisitions Incorporated, no one ever asks, "Should it be done?" Instead they ask, "How can it be done—and then how do we turn what we've done into cold, hard cash?" It's this kind of forward thinking that brings new power and magical understanding to the world—and which keeps the Acq Inc humanoid resources team constantly on the lookout for new talent.

Were you kicked out of your village for experimenting with powers no mortal should dare trifle with? Acquisitions Incorporated has a place for you on its team. Those pesky, gibbering voices that plague your sleep? Acq Inc allows employees to work all night if that fits their skill set. And if it was ordained at your birth by the seers and mystics that your destiny would one day see you bathe in the blood of your enemies, Acq Inc has no opinion on personal hygiene as long as the job gets done.

The amazing diversity on display across the full range of Acquisitions Incorporated franchises and commercial operations epitomizes the all-inclusive nature of an Acq Inc campaign. No matter what your favorite type of character, there's something for you in this chapter. Or, if you like, you can engage with the entrepreneurial spirit of the campaign by using this material to inspire ideas of your own. Do you want to embrace the feel of Acq Inc right from the get-go? Consider one of the new backgrounds in this chapter, all with a special focus on commerce or Acquisitions Incorporated itself. Worried about whether a specific class or subclass has what it takes to make it in a cut-throat mercantile environment? We've got the advice and narrative options you need.

This chapter also presents a new race inspired by the chaotic drive to achieve that underlies every Acq Inc campaign, as well as a number of spells with a decidedly financial flair. And finally, you'll get to meet some of the rival factions your characters will inevitably crash up against in the frenzied race for franchise success.

Backgrounds

Countless people come from loving, nurturing homes. Through hard work, clean living, and wise decisions, they excel at what they do. They live prosperous, respectable lives, leaving the world a better place than they found it.

You're not one of them.

Somewhere along the way, something went wrong. Maybe it was bad luck. Circumstances might have conspired to put you in an impossible situation. You could have Lady Fate's disfavor. Or you might be an incredible jackass. But whatever your circumstances, you are now entering a new phase of your life. The earning potential of an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise has given many wayward and lost souls a new lease on life. Those who scoffed at you or kicked you while you were down might soon be kissing up to you.

And who knows? Being an incredible jackass could work in your favor!

Celebrity Adventurer's Scion

Your family name strikes fear and admiration in the hearts of the common folk—but that's got nothing to do with you. Songs and stories celebrating the adventuring exploits of your famous parent are widely known. Kids across the land grew up wishing they were you. But being the child of a famous adventurer wasn't all hugs and kisses.

You seldom saw your celebrity-adventurer parent, and when they were around, it was all about them and tales of slaying this demon or vanquishing that dragon. All too often, you'd be woken out of a sound sleep by someone standing outside your home screaming about the latest threat to the town, the region, or the world.

In the end, all you have to show for your lineage is your name. Most of the family's money went for consumables, from *potions of healing* and *spell scrolls* to copious amounts of dwarven ale. And everyone expects you to swing a sword or sling spells like your famous forebear, making it doubly hard for you to prove yourself.

Skill Proficiency: Perception, Performance
Tool Proficiencies: Disguise kit
Languages: Two of your choice
Equipment: Disguise kit, a set of fine clothes, and a belt pouch containing 30 gp

Feature: Name Dropping

You know and have met any number of powerful people across the land—and some of them might even remember you. You might be able to wrangle minor assistance from a major figure in the campaign, at the DM's discretion. Additionally, the common folk treat you with deference, and your heritage and the stories you tell might be good for a free meal or a place to sleep.

Suggested Characteristics

Scions of celebrity adventurers must deal with fame that's not theirs, wealth they didn't earn, and expectations they can never hope to meet. These hardships can have adverse effects, but those who cope with them can arrive at a decent attitude and a grounded worldview. Those who fail become bitter—or worse.

d8	Personality Trait
1	I will never get out of my famous parent's shadow, and no one else will ever understand this burden.
2	I've seen enough of the adventuring life to have realistic expectations and empathy for my peers.
3	Living up to my legacy will be difficult, but I'm going to do it.
4	I'm used to the very best in life, and that's a hard habit to break.
5	My parent taught me a sense of duty. I strive to uphold it, even when the odds are against me.
6	No one can fake a smile, a handshake, or an interested nod like I can.
7	I've been part of the adventuring life since I was old enough to walk. Let me explain a few things to you.
8	No risk is too great for the rewards of defeating my enemies ... and taking their stuff.

d6	Ideal
1	**Power.** The only way to get ahead in this world is to attain power and hold onto it with all your might. (Evil)
2	**Peace.** Those who can find or make peace in the chaotic world around them have everything. (Lawful)
3	**Fame.** I've seen what fame can bring. And I'll do anything to get all that for myself. (Neutral)
4	**Training.** Hard work, sacrifice, and training lead to success—and eventually to perfection. (Any)
5	**Anonymity.** I want to be successful. And alone. With lots of guards and wards between me and everyone else in the world. (Any)
6	**Wisdom.** Material wealth is an illusion. Wisdom is the real treasure. (Good)

d6	Bond
1	While my parent was out adventuring, a servant raised me, and I care about that person more than anyone.
2	I consider every member of my parent's former adventuring party to be family.
3	Despite their absences, my famous parent was kind and generous. I love them and want to make them proud.
4	My parent once brought a cursed magic item home. It is my obsession.
5	My childhood home holds all my best memories, and its upkeep is my primary concern.
6	Growing up, I had an imaginary friend I could always count on. That friend is still with me.

d6	Flaw
1	You don't know what I'm going through. You never can.
2	You. Fetch my cloak. And maybe rub my feet for a while.
3	My comrades are brave, but I must defeat this threat alone to prove my worth.
4	Oh, yeah, that spell? Named after my parent's best friend. Let me tell you about them.
5	My best days are behind me. Ahead lies only toil, pain, and death.
6	You have to look out for yourself. No one else will.

Failed Merchant

Maybe you come from a long line of merchants. Perhaps you were an entrepreneur. Regardless, your ventures ended poorly. Whether it was because of outside influences, bad luck, or simply because your business acumen was weak, you lost everything.

With failure, however, comes experience. You're free of that old life, having made some connections and learned your lessons. Prepared to pursue the life of an adventurer, your insight into the world of commerce brought you into the sphere of Acquisitions Incorporated—and a franchise just might be in your future.

Skill Proficiency: Investigation, Persuasion
Tool Proficiencies: One type of artisan's tools
Languages: Any one of your choice
Equipment: One set of artisan's tools, merchant's scale, a set of fine clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 gp

Feature: Supply Chain

From your time as a merchant, you retain connections with wholesalers, suppliers, and other merchants and entrepreneurs. You can call upon these connections when looking for items or information.

Suggested Characteristics

Being a merchant involved having a head for numbers, a strong personality, the ability to make deals with hostile adversaries, a strong sword arm to fight off bandits, and the intuition for knowing what people want and need. The art of business is the art of finding the best path to profit, and that path might be different with each transaction. It takes a strong mind and a stronger stomach to succeed. So why did you fail?

d8	Personality Trait
1	I didn't have the cutthroat attitude necessary to succeed. I won't make that mistake again.
2	Even my competitors said I was affable and talented. Those traits should serve me well.
3	To prosper, you have to be in control.
4	The customer is always right.
5	I was cutting corners and breaking deals to maximize profit. That's why I failed.
6	When I get an idea, I am single-minded in its execution—even if it's a terrible idea.
7	If I can be everyone's friend, I'll always have support.
8	My heart wasn't in being a merchant, so I failed. I'm not all that keen on adventuring either, but I need the money.

d6	Ideal
1	**Survival.** Where there's life, there's hope. If I remain alive and flexible, I can succeed. (Any)
2	**Generosity.** People helped me when I was down. Now that I'm back on my feet, I'll pay it forward. (Good)
3	**Excitement.** Caution got me nowhere in my previous business. I'm not going to let it hold me back now. (Chaotic)
4	**Wealth.** With enough coin, I can buy comfort, power, knowledge, and even eternal life. Nothing will stand between me and money. (Evil)
5	**Stability.** The mercantile trade was too chaotic for me. I need a nice stable profession, like adventuring. (Lawful)
6	**Redemption.** Too many people consider me a failure. So I need to prove them wrong. (Any)

d6	Bond
1	My family means everything to me. I failed them before, and I must not do so again.
2	My church provides a connection to my god, so I must ensure that it is protected and funded.
3	My former business partner fell ill, and then our business failed. Part of my new venture involves earning enough to take care of their family.
4	If I take care of my possessions, they'll take care of me. People come and go, but a weapon or a wand is something you can always rely on.
5	Although my business failed, the people of my community were kind to me. I'll do everything in my power to protect them.
6	I owe a dangerous person a lot of money. As long as they're happy, they let my debt rest unpaid.

d6	Flaw
1	Why spend gold here when you can buy the same thing for copper in the next town?
2	I must have the best of everything. Like, right now.
3	You haven't heard of me? I'm sure that's because of your ignorance and low breeding.
4	I failed, but I'm awesome. So when anyone else is successful, it must be because of nepotism, dishonesty, or dumb luck.
5	I find that most people are trustworthy. Hey, where's my belt pouch?
6	Nothing gets between me and danger except my fellow adventurers. So I'll be sure to put them there.

Gambler

All you need to make a lot of gold is a little gold. Except at those times when all you need to have no gold at all is a little gold. Whether you're a good gambler or a bad one rarely matters, because no one can divine the whims of Lady Luck. Sometimes you're up, sometimes you're down. But the thing about gambling is that someone is always willing to take a bet.

Skill Proficiency: Deception, Insight
Tool Proficiencies: One gaming set
Languages: Any one of your choice
Equipment: One gaming set, a lucky charm, a set of fine clothes, and a belt pouch containing 15 gp

Feature: Never Tell Me the Odds

Odds and probability are your bread and butter. During downtime activities that involve games of chance or figuring odds on the best plan, you can get a solid sense of which choice is likely the best one and which opportunities seem too good to be true, at the DM's determination.

Suggested Characteristics

Some gamble out of necessity. Others do so out of boredom. Still others become addicted to the thrill of winning or losing everything on a turn of fortune. For some, gambling is less a matter of chance and more a matter of seeking every advantage to ensure the outcome. The best gamblers can lose everything, and the worst gamblers sometimes win. Regardless, you can always tell gamblers by the look in their eyes. Lady Luck haunts them.

d8	Personality Trait
1	I plan for every contingency. Leave nothing to chance!
2	Every copper wants to be a silver. Each bet is an opportunity.
3	I'm one of Lady Luck's favored. Anything I try is destined to succeed.
4	I've lost so much to gambling that I refuse to spend money on anything anymore.
5	Nothing is certain. Planning is a coward's act.
6	I can't be sure who I've swindled, cheated, or defeated, so I keep a low profile in public.
7	The perfect bet is out there somewhere. I just have to keep my eyes open.
8	I have beaten my addiction, but all it takes is one weak moment and I'll be back at the card table.

d6	Ideal
1	**Knowledge.** Knowledge is power, and knowing which horse to back is the key to success. (Any)
2	**Fate.** Whatever happens is fated, regardless of any planning or striving. (Lawful)
3	**Bravery.** If you want to succeed, you have to take risks. (Chaotic)
4	**Survival.** You can't win if you're dead. Live to fight another day—when the odds might be more in your favor. (Any)
5	**Reliability.** When I was in need, I was able to rely on others. Now I want to be the one others rely on. (Good)
6	**Victory.** Winning is the real measure of a person. In the end, the only thing that matters is the scoreboard. (Evil)

d6	Bond
1	One person in particular owes me a lot of money, and I need to keep them alive if I want to be repaid.
2	I'm loyal to the friend or family member who taught me how to gamble.
3	The person who saved me from my gambling addiction is the only reason I'm alive today.
4	A patron once fronted me money in exchange for a percentage of my winnings. I owe them a debt of gratitude. And a lot of cash.
5	A criminal syndicate I once played for isn't happy I left the game, and its enforcers are looking for me.
6	Urchins once helped me find marks for my games. Now I'm driven to help them escape the streets.

d6	Flaw
1	I don't know when to quit. Especially when everyone else is telling me to.
2	I save my sympathy for my friends, and I have no friends.
3	You think we're in trouble now? Let me tell you how bad things are likely to get!
4	You can loan me a little, right? I've got a sure thing. I'll double your money, guaranteed.
5	I was once a terribly flawed person, like you. Let me tell you how you can save yourself.
6	I'm a great gambler. I'm just bad at math and logic.

Plaintiff

Sure, accidents happen. But they seem to happen an awful lot when Acquisitions Incorporated operatives are on the scene. Naturally, nothing ever happens when there are no witnesses left behind. But sometimes one casualty is left a little less than dead, just waiting to discover what a lucky break that accident actually was.

You were a victim of a legal incident that was ostensibly the fault of Acquisitions Incorporated. At least that's what the local magistrate said. But before a final ruling could be handed down, Acquisitions Incorporated offered you a job! Don't know how to swing a sword? They promised to teach you! Think you have what it takes to sling spells? They've got masters who'll have you throwing fire in no time!

With the promise of untold treasures and realms of magic and mystery just a dungeon away, you left your old life behind. Now a world of adventure is yours. Just initial here and sign here and here. Absolve Acq Inc of all former claims, and acknowledge you understand past outcomes don't guarantee future results.

Skill Proficiency: Medicine, Persuasion
Tool Proficiencies: One type of artisan's tools
Languages: Any one of your choice
Equipment: One set of artisan's tools, fine clothes, 20 gp

Feature: Legalese

Your experience with your local legal system has given you a firm knowledge of the ins and outs of that system.

Even when the law is not on your side, you can use complex terms like *ex injuria jus non oritur* and *cogitationis poenam nemo patitur* to frighten people into thinking you know what you're talking about. With common folks who don't know any better, you might be able to intimidate or deceive to get favors or special treatment.

Suggested Characteristics

Plaintiffs come in many varieties. Some are innocent bystanders who want only fair compensation for their injuries. Others are professional courtroom operatives, going to extreme lengths to appear wronged in pursuit of a large payout.

d8	Personality Trait
1	I can't believe I have a chance to join Acquisitions Incorporated! The fun I'm going to have!
2	I've been wronged my entire life, and the world owes me.
3	I have always tried to make the best of a bad situation.
4	The law doesn't protect the honest and the hard working. I'm going to do whatever needs to be done to make things right.
5	I'm always in the wrong place at the wrong time.
6	My superiors are smarter and wiser than I am. I do what I'm told.
7	Never pass up the opportunity to make an easy bit of coin. That's my motto.
8	I'm beginning to feel like the gods are not on my side.

d6	Ideal
1	**Justice.** Those who break the law need to answer for their crimes. (Lawful)
2	**Freedom.** People must have the freedom to do what they want and pursue their dreams. (Chaotic)
3	**Greed.** Everyone I see is getting theirs, so I'm surely going to get mine. (Evil)
4	**Chaos.** You're out of order! And you're out of order! This whole realm is out of order! (Chaotic)
5	**Humility.** I'm just a small part of a larger whole. So is everyone else. (Neutral)
6	**Responsibility.** We all have our roles to play. I'll hold up my end of the bargain. (Any)

d6	Bond
1	Others hurt in the same accident that hurt me are my new family. I'll make sure they're taken care of.
2	The rulers of this place were kind to me, and they have my lifelong devotion.
3	My parents worry about me, but I'll make them proud.
4	The only bond that matters is the one holding my money pouch to my belt.
5	The other new hires at Acquisitions Incorporated are my allies. We have each other's backs.
6	My legal counsel is my best friend. I owe all my forthcoming opportunities to their hard work.

d6	Flaw
1	The person who gains the most reward for the least effort wins.
2	Three magic beans for just one cow? What a deal!
3	I have only one vice, but it controls my life.
4	Sleep is for the weak. We need to keep training more if we're going to be ready for the challenges ahead.
5	Until my songs are sung in every tavern in this realm, I won't be satisfied.
6	If people find me unpleasant, that's their problem.

Rival Intern

You were an intern at a rival of Acquisitions Incorporated, and you gained a healthy respect for not just the job and the franchising opportunities, but for the ruthless and efficient way Acquisitions Incorporated goes about its business. Why deal with the rest, when you can work for the best?

Perhaps the rival did not treat you as well as you were hoping, or you washed out of that organization. Maybe you hope to leverage the knowledge you gained there for an advantage at Acquisitions Incorporated. Either way, you're now bringing your talents to the company, ready to put your skills to use.

Skill Proficiency: History, Investigation
Tool Proficiencies: One type of artisan's tools
Languages: Any one of your choice
Equipment: One set of artisan's tools, a ledger from your previous employer containing a small piece of useful information, a set of fine clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 gp

Feature: Inside Informant

You have connections to your previous employer or other groups you dealt with during your previous employment. You can communicate with your contacts, gaining information at the DM's discretion.

Suggested Characteristics

If you were happy with your previous internship, the parting of ways might have been amicable. If not, it might have involved armed guards removing you from the premises. If you were passed over at your previous position, it might have left you a blend of seething rage, practiced nonchalance, and keen knowledge of where the bodies are buried (perhaps literally).

d8	Personality Trait
1	My previous employer didn't respect me, and now I'll do whatever I can to gain respect.
2	The job is important, but the relationships I forge with my coworkers are even more so.
3	The job is everything to me. Who needs relaxation, hobbies, and a social life?
4	I know I'm not the best and brightest, but if I put my best self forward, I can overcome anything.
5	My former boss was an idiot. So was my boss before that. And before that. I'm sure those were all coincidences.
6	This company is so much better than my previous one. It will always be the best until they stop paying me.
7	I know this dagger belongs to the company, but I'm sure they won't miss it. Or this flask. Or this armor.
8	It's only a matter of time before I'll be upper management. I just have to kiss up to my superiors and kick down those beneath me.

d6	Ideal
1	**Advancement.** Money and power can be gained more easily within an organization. I plan to gain as much as possible. (Evil)
2	**Structure.** Life goes much more smoothly when you follow the rules and work within a system. (Lawful)
3	**Uncertainty.** The more chaos that swirls around me, the more opportunities I can find to profit. (Chaotic)
4	**Justice.** I can't stand people being treated unjustly. I do whatever it takes to stop injustice and those who flout the law. (Lawful)
5	**Pleasure.** What's the use of working hard and making money if you can't enjoy the finer things in life? (Any)
6	**Power.** Money is fine, but real power means never having to say you're sorry. (Evil)

d6	Bond
1	I have a family member in need. I consider them in everything I do.
2	My peers keep me grounded.
3	My past mistakes cost someone else dearly. I have to rectify that.
4	A childhood mentor put me on my current path. If I succeed, I want to repay that mentor in some way.
5	I value an oath of loyalty I took to a group of friends over everything else in my life.
6	Although I don't get along well with people, my pet means the world to me.

d6	Flaw
1	I know what's best. Trust me.
2	Flaw? I have no flaws. I'm perfect.
3	My loyalties are ... fluid.
4	If anything goes wrong, it must be someone else's fault. Let me explain that in detail.
5	There's right and there's wrong, and there's no gray area in between.
6	Our superiors might not like what you're doing. I'm going to have to put that in my report.

Playing with Class

In the many fantasy worlds of Dungeons & Dragons, typical adventurers succeed by the dint of copious amounts of hard work, luck, natural talent, and extensive training. But then, who wants to play a typical adventurer? And who wants to merely succeed?

Franchisees of Acquisitions Incorporated want to thrive. They want to dominate. They want to pillage lairs and loot the treasure that makes all their dreams come true. Whether it's unlocking the secrets of the multiverse, living in the soft and supple lap of luxury, holding sway over hordes of adoring followers, or maybe even helping people and saving lives, Acq Inc franchisees do everything grandly, epically, and with panache.

Or if they fail and die horribly in the attempt, they do so with style.

This section discusses how to subtly massage (or radically mutate) the feel of the standard character classes to make them the best possible fit for the chaotic and creative majesty of an Acquisitions Incorporated game. This includes both general advice on playing a character of a particular class, and thoughts on how some of the many subclasses for the game (including subclasses from *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*) can be reframed for an Acq Inc campaign.

Each class section offers up suggestions for adding detail and narrative flair to your character. Where tables are presented as part of those suggestions, you can choose or randomly select from the options presented therein, or use them as inspiration for your own stylish ideas. The effects noted on a table are always benign, and don't grant any benefit or impose any penalties.

Barbarian

You don't need to be the smartest person in the room. You just need to be able to kill everyone else in the room, so you're the smartest person left.

Rage is overrated. Sure, being covered with the blood, sweat, saliva, and entrails of one's enemies might be fun from time to time, but the cleaning costs alone can eat up a big chunk of a franchise's profits. Running half-naked through grimy dungeons? Cathartic for sure. Hygienic? Not so much.

Strength, endurance, and fighting don't necessarily have to come from unresolved childhood issues or a brooding, roiling well of anger. Primal instincts are valuable, but there are plenty of primal forces in the world—including the unrestrained drive for wealth, power, and everything that comes with it.

The Corporate Barbarian

Barbarians in the Corporate World

For every CEO building up or bringing down businesses, it's a safe bet that there's a barbarian standing behind them. Often literally, with a large weapon in hand, and waiting for the order to go out and remove vital organs from another CEO. Corporate barbarians are the muscle behind the civil face of a franchise. It's not that they enjoy losing their composure and having to make other people's nice clothes all bloody, but some circumstances require carefully applied martial force. And others require the same thing, but with a lot less care.

Sending a Clear Message

As a barbarian in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, you're not all about killing. Maiming and disfigurement are also a big part of the job. Permanently eliminating someone who owes your franchise money or who double-crossed you on a deal sends a short, clear message. But leaving them hobbling when they walk or incapable of eating without a team of specialists sends a glorious, evocative poem—the kind of violent sonnet that resonates not just with the recipient, but with bystanders as well.

To maximize the power of your intimidation, you need to make sure the world knows who's delivering it. That's why you employ a tool of your trade: the signature item. Whenever you're particularly proud of a completed project, you leave an item at the scene to claim the work as your own.

Signature Items

d10	Item
1	A tooth from a previous victim, wrapped in a silk handkerchief
2	A calling card with your name on it
3	A quick charcoal sketch of your victim, done in your own hand
4	Petals from your favorite flower
5	Six drops of blood, either your own or someone else's
6	A carved ivory die with an eye instead of a pip on the 1 face
7	A copper coin bearing the likeness of a reaper
8	A tiny vial containing a few drops of the homemade ale you're so proud of
9	A riddle, joke, or verse
10	An IOU, accompanied by you taking something from the victim

Style Makes the Raider

Your savage kin of the wilds sport tattoos to celebrate their connection to their tribes or ancestors. They might wear fetishes or carry totems symbolizing their allegiance to ancestral spirits. That's cute and all, but you have your own style. Whether in the boardroom or on the battlefield, you announce your presence. When you stride into a fight, people say, "There's a force to be reckoned with! And who does their tailoring?!"

Barbarian Style

d10	Style
1	A fur-lined, double-breasted suit with a corporate logo on the pocket
2	A hand-woven turban from a master tailor of Calimshan
3	Soft leather boots with a notable personal symbol etched into the side
4	A pair of suspenders made from the hide of a displacer beast
5	A gold belt buckle depicting the Dwarvish rune for chaos
6	A specially tailored belt pouch that you wear at the small of your back
7	Stylish mirrored spectacles
8	A specially dyed tunic containing all the colors of the rainbow in a swirled pattern
9	An overcoat with numerous pockets and leather patches on the elbows
10	Golden grillwork for your teeth, set with small gems that mark out ancient glyphs translating as "Getting Paid"

Walking a Different Path

Acquisitions Incorporated barbarians walk a different path than their kin of the wild lands. Or, more precisely, they walk familiar paths in unique and novel ways.

Path of the Ancestral Guardian

Rather than calling upon the spirits of your ancestors, you are in communion with the franchise executives and corporate raiders who have traveled your path before. These paragons of commerce still exist in the spirit world, bemoaning their losses and looking to balance their debts in the afterlife by providing guidance to others. Sometimes these spirits appear as officious clerks reminding you of expense accounts and budgets. Other times, they are fellow heavies and knee breakers who died in the line of duty, sarcastically calling out your mistakes in a misguided effort to be of assistance.

d6	Spirit Guardian
1	A half-orc enforcer called Joey Plantain, missing his right arm
2	A disgraced tax collector named Nibbin Clutchquill
3	An overly enthusiastic morale liaison called Apricot Reese
4	A grumpy dwarf carriage driver nicknamed Bolt
5	A pair of identical twin circus performers called Stella and Bella
6	An elf bodyguard known as Mistress Leafwind

Path of the Totem Warrior

Unlike your wilder cousins, your connection to the spirit world is a little less woodsy and a little more civilized. However, that doesn't mean you still can't invoke the power of a totem creature when you need it. Rather than calling upon the bear, eagle, or wolf as your totem, you might gain the same features by calling upon more urban creatures.

Totem Animal	Urban Replacements
Bear	Otyugh, giant spider
Eagle	Crow, flying snake
Wolf	Giant rat, giant fire beetle

Path of the Zealot

You might not be particularly faithful, but your dedication to your job can easily be mistaken for a kind of religious zeal. For long years, that dedication has been a force that guides you, granting you abilities beyond those of other skilled warriors. Rather than worshiping Tempus or Bane, Gruumsh or Tyr, you instead bow down before the altar of your own superiority, channeling your ego to drive your franchise's success.

Seeming a "square peg" for the task at first glance, a barbarian might be an excellent choice, as they would destroy both the round hole and their own corners in the attempt to serve. It would be neat to see if this worked outside of an analogy.

—K'thriss Drow'b

Class Acts

In addition to a number of subclasses from the *Player's Handbook*, this section makes reference to the following subclasses from *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*:

Barbarian: Path of the Ancestral Guardian, Path of the Zealot
Bard: College of Glamour, College of Whispers
Druid: Circle of Dreams, Circle of the Shepherd
Fighter: Arcane Archer, Cavalier, Samurai
Monk: Way of the Drunken Master, Way of the Kensei, Way of the Sun Soul
Paladin: Oath of Conquest
Ranger: Gloom Stalker, Horizon Walker, Monster Slayer
Rogue: Mastermind, Scout, Swashbuckler
Sorcerer: Divine Soul, Shadow Magic, Storm Sorcery
Warlock: Celestial, Hexblade
Wizard: War Magic

Bard

There is nothing I would like to do more than explain to you why I'm standing here with stolen goods and my rapier sticking out of this still-warm corpse, officer. I assure you, I have a completely reasonable and plausible explanation.

Singing songs and strumming lutes might be fine for most bards. Who doesn't like a rousing shanty now and then? But standing in a crowded tavern playing for copper pieces tossed by commoners isn't for everyone—and it certainly isn't for bards in the Acq Inc world. The power and magic tied up in the voice of a franchise bard is meant for greater things. More profitable things.

Adventuring and commerce are where the true lessons of life are learned, and your bardic magic guarantees your mastery of those lessons. Your love of music has shown you that the world of commerce is a finely tuned instrument in its own right—and you're just the one to pluck it.

Master of One Trade: Awesomeness

As a bard, you're known as the go-to figure when things need to get done. Your tremendous array of skills and abilities mean that you're often the first one called upon to do the hard jobs. And if you're going to do something difficult, you might as well do it with panache. Since most of your franchise compatriots likely think "panache" is some kind of elven delicacy, it's all the more impressive.

Jumping a small pit? Land with the flourish of a world-class gymnast! Slaying a kobold? Take it down with a legendary oath, and no one will realize that an asthmatic farmhand could have done the same thing with a rusty sickle. Running across a room? Use *prestidigitation* to blow your hair back, making it look like you have the speed and grace of Corellon themself.

Cutting Wit and Wicked Barbs

When others pick on you about being a bard, you need only remind them that you and you alone have the power to insult creatures to death. Just the other day, your harsh word about a goblin's haircut caused it to keel over, bleeding from its ears. But with such great power comes the great responsibility—of not being lame. When you use your spells and class features to denigrate your enemies into an early grave, you need to have a number of tried and true zingers at hand to add the perfect insult to the ultimate injury.

Insults to Die For

d20	Insult
1	Did your mother have any children who lived?
2	Who dressed you, a grimlock?
3	You smell like a hell hound's hindquarters.
4	You're as helpful as a halfling.
5	Let me guess. You're a self-taught wizard?
6	Your personality has all the warmth of a winter wolf.
7	You're the loveliest hag in the coven.
8	You're not the sharpest piercer in the cave.
9	Aren't you a little short for a giant?
10	Truly, your intellect is as deep as a *Tenser's floating disk*.
11	Did you wake up in a troglodyte den this morning, or is that how you normally smell?
12	You must have been sick the day they taught fighting at warrior school.
13	Gruumsh must have closed his eye when he created you.
14	I can see you, but where's the dragon that pooped you out?
15	You've got all the good sense of a mind flayer's last meal.
16	You don't know a beholder from a gas spore.
17	I suspected you'd fallen out of the idiot tree, but I didn't know you were dragged through Stupid Forest afterward.
18	There's nothing about your looks that a full-face helmet wouldn't improve.
19	You're about as useful as an orc horde at a tea party.
20	I've seen better-looking faces on a gibbering mouther.

The Wrong Kind of People

While being the most impressive member of the party can be beneficial, it does come with some drawbacks. Attention and renown make others fear and respect you for sure, but that renown eventually draws sworn enemies to you whose sole purpose is your downfall. And no matter how fast you eliminate or convert one of those enemies, it's only a matter of time before another one takes their place.

Notable Enemies

d10	Enemy
1	A guard captain who was fired for failing to catch you after you flouted the law
2	A former master bard whose songs you stole and knowledge you plundered
3	A lesser noble who you double-crossed in a brilliant scheme
4	A fallen paladin who you tricked into breaking their oath
5	A leader of another adventuring party who blames you for their downfall
6	A former adventuring partner who you cut loose because of their lack of skill
7	The master of a powerful guild whose wares you were involved in pilfering
8	A government official who you tricked into providing secrets
9	A former tavern owner who lost their business when you implicated them in a scheme they weren't actually involved in
10	A moneylender who you inadvertently bankrupted

Transferring Colleges

The loose association of minstrels and masters that was your bard college helps to define your knowledge and skills. Still, no matter what your original collegiate connections, as a bard in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, you now focus that learning into your own personal school of business.

College of Glamour

The lessons taught by the College of Glamour are right in your wheelhouse. Being able to make friends and influence people is the bread and butter of your profession. Rather than ply this trade in public squares and seedy alehouses, however, you have trained yourself to deliver your speeches in boardrooms and guildhalls. It's all about convincing people to see your side of an issue—then motivating them to do exactly what you want.

College of Lore

Some people swear by a well-rounded liberal-arts education. But the lore you seek out is a little more useful in its application. Knowing the capital cities of all the nations of the world might be nice on trivia night down at the tavern. But knowing the identity and location of a dozen nobles' illegitimate children carries a little more utility in the adventuring world.

College of Whispers

The College of Whispers teaches a skill set that's attractive in terms of its power, but which can be incredibly off-putting to anyone with any moral compass. Thankfully, that'll never be a problem for you. The ability to mess with others' minds is a skill that needs to be used cautiously and wisely. Otherwise, you'll never gain the much-needed trust that's part and parcel of being an effective business leader.

Cleric

I have faith in the power of the marketplace, and I see a lot of nonbelievers out there with money to spend.

If you think wading through scores of undead in a haunted crypt or channeling divine power to keep your party alive gets the adrenaline flowing, you should try keeping the peace at a corporate board meeting. Or managing the hostile takeover of a rival. Try negotiating merchandising rights. It's not for the faint of heart.

Thankfully, your business acumen draws on insight that's literally out of this world. As an emissary of divine will, you possess the guiding wisdom that every franchise needs, and the knowledge that your business plans are always the best ones. Because the gods would never let you down, right?

Have Faith in Diversification

Despite their supposed wisdom, many common clerics fail to grasp the simple concept of using the best tool for the job. To the devoted priest of Tempus, every problem is just begging to be solved by a formal declaration of war. A cleric of Bane has never met a minion they couldn't wait to kick around. Lathander's clerics are all sunshine and happiness, even when they should be hiding in dark places to avoid danger.

As a cleric in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, you'll carefully choose your deity so that the domains of your divine patron synergize seamlessly with the goals of your franchise. But at the same time, you understand that the greatest thing about the gods is their prolificacy. With so many deities in so many pantheons, all of them have their own stock to sell. As such, even though you have your own personal favorite, you've also learned the value of diversifying your divine portfolio, keeping an array of holy symbols and icons on hand for any occasion.

Divine Deals

From the most notable nobles to the most humble members of the working class, everyone needs faith and spiritual guidance. And what better way to teach the value of faith to others than to make sure the value of faith is measured in gp. In addition to your franchise's regular operations, you always keep a sideline going in religious paraphernalia, selling specialized signature items to select markets. By showing the world that faith is your business, you can ensure that business is always booming.

Relics of Faith

d8	Relic
1	Saint's-thighbone walking stick (50 gp)
2	Do-it-yourself indulgence kit (10 gp)
3	Holy-water-brewed ale (20 gp)
4	Deva wing-feather bookmark (10 gp)
5	Deity-autographed holy symbol (100 gp)
6	Scratch-and-sniff icon (5 gp)
7	Planetar shaving set (15 gp)
8	Unexpurgated holy texts with all the really naughty bits (10 gp)

> Name a more iconic profession. I'll wait.
>
> —Omin Dran

Clerical Routine

You might pray for your spells each day at dawn, by the dark of the moon, or whenever the fighter kicks you awake to tell you your long rest is done, get healing already! Either way, it's good to incorporate a regular ritual into your daily devotions.

Meditative Rituals

d8	Ritual
1	Fifteen minutes of deity-mandated calisthenics
2	Handwriting a detailed agenda for the next 24 hours
3	Sitting in silence for 15 minutes, while screaming "Shut up!" at anyone who makes noise
4	Sleep another hour; your deity says it's fine
5	Burning incense and lighting a candle on a makeshift altar while you recite your vows
6	Practicing battle forms and stances
7	Creating a new likeness of your deity out of whatever materials you have on hand
8	Drinking a lot of wine (sacramental, of course)

The Ways of Faith

Every cleric has a uniquely personal connection to their deity. You are no exception, though you like to think you bring your own special flair to the relationship, and vice versa.

Relationship with Your Deity

d10	Relationship
1	Your deity possesses you and speaks through your lips, and you need someone else to take notes.
2	You see your deity's signs in the movements of creatures, the changing weather, the shapes of buildings, other stuff.
3	In secret, you curse the burden your deity has placed on you.
4	You wonder often if you're worthy of your deity's gifts.
5	You're convinced your deity isn't all-knowing, because they clearly have no idea what you really get up to.
6	Your deity gives you power and you give them glory—at any cost.
7	Those other clerics don't love your deity like you do.
8	You were raised religious, but you only really go to church on the high holidays.
9	Your deity's grace gives you peace. Their anger drives your fury.
10	You've got buyer's remorse, and you're wondering if this is really the deity for you.

Acquisition as a Holy Chore

Faerûn is full of pantheons and deities, some of more relevance and power than others. All those deities and their servants can be found in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, but a few select gods, goddesses, and otherworldly powers might play a larger role.

Abbathor

This dwarven deity of greed gets a bad rap. Because seriously, greed is just another form of the fundamental urge for survival. If gold is power and power is life, then the more gold you accumulate, the better and longer your life will be. Why is it that people who have money and power are admired and respected, yet people who stop at nothing to attain money and power are "avaricious" or "materialistic" or "felons"? Abbathor might be looked down upon and called evil for the lengths his followers sometimes go to in the pursuit of wealth, but the power he represents is the end goal of many an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise.

Asmodeus

When they coined the phrase "making a deal with the devil," this is the devil they were talking about. The Lords of the Nine Hells are the original CEOs of some of the multiverse's most profitable megacorporations, and Asmodeus is their master. If you want a model for efficiency and motivation in an organization, look no further than the infernal expanse of Nessus. You want to talk about a perfect sales pitch and a diabolically intricate contract? Asmodeus has you covered. Many civilized nations don't even count worshiping Asmodeus as a crime, unless you get into those nasty side trips of humanoid sacrifice and the like. But as long as you remain cognizant of not wanting to throw away potential customers that way, how much risk of going down that path could there be?

Jergal

Death is a serious business. Literally. Jergal is a lesser deity who works alongside Kelemvor, the god of the dead. But whereas Kelemvor sees to the more metaphysical side of death, Jergal sees to the details. Where did sweet Nana want to be buried? What rites did your dearly departed love want performed? And how much of a donation to the church will you be making to see those things done? As an Acquisitions Incorporated cleric devoted to Jergal, you understand that there are only two sure things in this world: death, and getting paid to do something with the body.

Lliira

The Lady of Joy brings merriment, happiness, and fun to the world. And there's nothing people will pay more for than merriment, happiness, and fun. As a cleric worshiping Lliira, you open yourself up to become a vessel for the goddess's joy—for a price, of course. Because surely, if joy sustains the soul just as food sustains the body, then there's nothing wrong with making a bit of profit from happiness.

Mask

The Master of All Thieves is an important deity for Acquisitions Incorporated characters to be aware of. Mask is the god of acquisition, after all, and governs the secrets that any successful Acq Inc franchise will be dealing in. Whether personal, professional, or business-related, secrets are an important component of gaining leverage over others. Moreover, your successful franchise will eventually have many secrets of its own that you desperately need to keep quiet.

Oghma

Everyone knows the adage that knowledge is power, but no one believes it more than the worshipers of Oghma. As a follower of the god of inspiration, invention, and knowledge, you seek knowledge for its own sake. But as a member of Acquisitions Incorporated, you understand further that knowledge is just the first component of any business plan, and that turning knowledge into power requires a consistent amount of the follow-up action that your franchise is famous for.

Sune

The wise know that people are defined by their desires as much as anything else, and the Princess of Passion is the patron of desires. In the battle of logic versus passion, it's passion that guides mortals and gods more often than not. As an Acquisitions Incorporated cleric of Sune, your intimate understanding of passion—or, better yet, your skill at manipulating the passions of others—can be a huge boon to the operation of a successful franchise.

Tymora

Luck is a lady tonight! And, as it turns out, every night. The goddess of fortune is known as Lady Luck, and every adventurer knows the importance of keeping luck on their side. As a pragmatic Acq Inc cleric of Tymora, you know that only stupid people ask the rhetorical question, "Would you rather be lucky or good at something?" Because no matter how good you are, you'll eventually have the bad luck of facing off against someone who's a whole lot better. When that happens, good luck is the only thing that's going to save you.

Waukeen

The Coinmaiden is the de facto patron of anyone who trades goods or services for payment. And thankfully, her relative ambivalence toward the laws underlying fair trade and honoring deals makes Waukeen a perfect fit for an Acquisitions Incorporated cleric. Regardless of your best intentions, ensuring the success of your franchise means eventually having to gingerly step across some ethical or moral line. Or having to hide the fact that your franchise companions have been busy erasing the line completely.

Druid

My plan for creating an intern tier consisting of nothing but giant ants should allow us to increase productivity by 37 percent. Who's with me?

At first glance, druids might not seem the best fit for an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, with its frequent forays into urban settings and its focus on treasure procurement and business considerations. But the primal power wielded by druids reflects the relentless cycles of nature, which in turn make a remarkably prescient model for business. Growth and stagnation. Boom and

bust. It's all there, writ large in the passage of the seasons and the ancient dance of bigger creatures consuming smaller creatures. And let's face it, those smaller creatures probably had it coming to them.

Nature's Envoy

Some of the most lucrative ruins and monster lairs happen to be located inconveniently in the uncivilized wilds of the world. As an Acquisitions Incorporated druid, your specialty is getting your party into and out of such areas with maximum profit and minimum bloodshed. (Well, your blood anyway.) When a veritable army of natural things that want to eat you stands between your franchise and profit, you're the one the other party members are looking to for guidance.

Almost as importantly, every adventuring group bent on exploiting the natural world to gain resources and power needs a conservation expert to tell them when they've gone too far. After all, only fools would destroy their environment in the name of vast profits. Right?

Running Wild

Branding is everything. Whenever you take on a wild shape form, you do so with a unique bit of personal style that lets folks know you're a beast to be reckoned with.

Distinguishing Features of Wild Shape

d6	Feature
1	Your pelt is rich hues of gold and silver so bright that they reflect light.
2	When you take wild shape form, it's a painful, squelchy process that usually leaves your fellow adventurers queasy.
3	Your wild shape forms all wear an identical ceremonial bracelet on one limb, decorated with teeth.
4	A dark patch on your body is recognizable as the silhouette of Omin Dran
5	You always have twigs, leaves, and other refuse tangled in your fur or hair.
6	When you switch back to your normal form, one hand always manages to retain its fur or feathers for a short while.

Nature in Unlikely Places

Even the most urban of locations feature sites of natural beauty and primal energy. You quickly become familiar with all such locations in the towns and cities you frequent, making them places for prayer, meditation, and arboreal solace. In addition to hanging out in parks or arboretums (or creating parks and arboretums in vacant lots when no one's looking), you might also be called upon to tend to struggling foliage or sick animals, eliminate threats to natural spaces, or serve as a font of horticultural and biological lore to folk in the area.

> Druids are natural-born leaders. We are beasts of war and shepherds of balance. People might underestimate you for your "simple" ways, but your teeth will find their flesh all the same. Not that I condone eating your party members, of course. Only when absolutely necessary.
>
> —Walnut Dankgrass

Urban Sanctuaries

d10	Sanctuary
1	A cemetery that acts as a de facto park
2	A museum hosting rare plants and animals from other lands
3	A swampy patch, unsuitable for building, teeming with marsh flora and fauna
4	A large copse containing the habitats of tree-dwelling animals
5	A community garden whose bounty is shared by local residents
6	A ruined section of the city that has been reclaimed by nature
7	A zoo overseen by a strange but powerful fellow druid
8	A private park that charges a fee for entrance, ensuring that only the wealthy can enjoy its serenity
9	A nature reserve stocked with scared and confused animals that are hunted for sport
10	A business that grows and harvests rare and exotic plants and animals for creating magical and mundane products

Steward of Nature

Though you might split your franchise life between the rural and the urban worlds, you never forget the wilderness where you came from. Because you've brought a piece of that wilderness with you. An unusual creature that came under your care when you were younger remains a part of your life, whether because you've decided you're the only person who can properly look after it, or vice versa.

Creatures to Care For

d10	Creature
1	A carnivorous plant with a taste for fine foods
2	A colony of bees whose hive once hung from a tree in your homeland
3	A seven-legged pygmy giant spider once used as a pixie's mount
4	A baby death dog that shows no evil tendencies (yet)
5	An orphaned owlbear cub-chick with a never-ending cold
6	An unhatched silvery egg that is ice-cold to the touch
7	A very small, very old awakened shrub
8	A grouchy badger that lives under your bed
9	A feral cat that thinks it's much tougher than it is
10	A friendly stirge that nests in your backpack and drinks only fruit juice

Closing the Circles

Though many druid circles are inspired by and focused on the natural world, even the most woodsy circles can fit into an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign with surprising ease.

Circle of Dreams

Normally, druids who come from the Circle of Dreams have a connection to the dreamy lands of the Feywild. As an Acquisitions Incorporated druid, you maintain this connection and expand it, embracing the marketing potential of dreams and positive energy. This effluence of radiance and light is meant to be harnessed, shaped, and shared with as many people as possible. And if they're willing to pay for that sharing, so much the better.

Circle of the Land

Any organization that wants to make an imprint on the world needs to employ an environmental consultant, ensuring that they're engaging with the land in a sustainable and efficient manner. As a druid of the Circle of the Land, your role in your franchise makes extensive use of your knowledge of nature. Your expertise ensures that the exploits of the franchise don't disturb nature—and just as importantly, prevent nature from disturbing the franchise.

Circle of the Moon

Circle of the Moon druids are known for the myriad animal forms they wear, but those forms need not tie you to the wilderness. In rat form, you can slip past the sentries of a well-guarded guildhall to secure trade secrets. On a risky urban operation, you can adopt the form of a pigeon or an alley cat to be your party's chief scout and spy. And in a pinch, your most combat-focused animal forms make you an excellent hand at black ops, able to infiltrate, extricate, or eradicate with equal verve.

Circle of the Shepherd

The world is a dangerous place, and the innocent always need champions to keep the figurative and literal wolves at bay. Others in your circle focus on protecting the helpless creatures of the wild from natural and unnatural threats. But your vow of protection extends to the common folk as well, recognizing that they are just as much a part of the natural world—and are often just as scared and helpless as any creature left to the mercy of that world.

Fighter

The best thing about blood money is that it spends just as readily as any other kind of money.

Some fight to slake bloodlust. Others fight for the thrill of besting an enemy. Some fight for a code, a faith, or an ideal. But a true pragmatist fights only for coin, understanding that battle is a means to an end and not an end in itself. A fighter in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign often fights for money above all else, whether focusing on a primary role as a combat specialist or providing martial backup for the franchise as needs be.

Mission Accomplished

Whether your intention is to end a target's threat or simply deliver a message (violently or otherwise), those around you can take comfort in knowing that when you take on a job, the job gets done. When your franchise loses its direction or collective nerve, you stand tall with the power of your convictions and an even more powerful assortment of weapons to keep things on track. If that sometimes inspires a need to crack some rival skulls, that's just the way of war. And if those skulls sometimes turn out to belong to people on your own side of the ledger, well, that's just business.

You are anything but reckless, however, recognizing the effort that goes into doing a job right. Berserkers flailing about the battlefield and challenging all comers have a certain amount of flamboyance, sure. But you can't spend the coin you've been promised for a job if the job leaves you dead.

Keeping them Guessing

No combat tactic is too down-and-dirty when your life and the welfare of your franchise are on the line. Smart fighters use any means necessary to gain the edge in battle, whether those tricks were learned from a long-gone drill instructor, first used by an opponent against you, or an original tactic perfected by long hours of training.

Martial Tricks

d6	Trick
1	You are an expert at pretending you've been injured to the point where you can't possibly go on. By goading foes to finish you off, you keep your allies safe as you reveal how much fight you still have in you.
2	You always keep a small pouch of salt or sand at your belt. If you can blind an opponent, even momentarily, you can usually end a fight quickly.
3	You fight with your off hand at the start of a battle, so that your opponent sets their defenses and attacks to one side. Then you quickly switch hands at the most opportune moment, making your foe wonder what other tricks you might play.
4	Swearing, name-calling, political satire—you do it all. You make use of a range of down-and-dirty fighting epithets that would make an ogre barbarian blush.
5	You constantly converse with your opponents during the battle, doing whatever you can to distract them or get into their heads. It's surprising how many combatants enter a fight not knowing whether their boots have come untied.
6	You have a belt pouch specially made to release ball bearings or caltrops in the thick of the fight, forcing your enemies to avoid those hazards while fending off your blows.

Wielding the Best

It might seem ridiculous to say that your weapon, armor, or shield is your best friend and most stalwart companion—but you'll take that risk. If you had to choose between entering a battle without your favorite combat gear or without the party's bard, Singy McLuteface can sit this one out. You and your equipment have got this.

Your piece of signature equipment is more than a tool that has never let you down. It lets others know who you are on the battlefield. Even when your features are

obscured by the blood of the fallen, the dust of a well-trodden arena, or the fog of war, allies and enemies alike take notice when you stalk the battlefield.

Signature Equipment

d12	Equipment
1	Handcrafted arrows whose heads bear the mark of a lightning bolt, and which give a distinctive whistle when fired
2	A shield made from the shell of a giant turtle
3	A matching shortsword and dagger, decorated to look like the upper and lower jaws of a carnivorous dinosaur
4	A battleaxe with its head shaped like the flowing hair of a dwarf warrior
5	A suit of armor made from the discarded chitin of giant arthropods
6	A pair of boots fashioned to look like the paws of a large feline
7	A sword whose pommel is shaped in the form of a hand, so that you shake the hand when you wield it
8	A hammer forged to resemble a giant's fist on one side and a dragon's head on the other
9	A helmet shaped like the head of a hare, with tiny diamonds for eyes
10	A bow carved with images of the phases of the moon
11	A dagger with a handle made of bone, etched with worn and unreadable runes
12	A backpack made from the leather and fur of a skunk

Victory Is Yours

When the battle is done, enemies and allies alike stare in awe at the sight of your personal ritual of celebration.

Victory Celebration

d10	Celebration
1	A finely honed, well-choreographed dance
2	Ale! And then more ale!
3	Seizing a trophy from a vanquished foe
4	Composing a poem extolling your valiant combat prowess
5	Adding a commemorative square to your battle quilt
6	Adding a decorative stencil to your favorite weapon or armor
7	Paying the town crier to proclaim your victory
8	Commissioning a painting of the battle
9	Praising surviving enemies for a job well done, no hard feelings
10	There is no time to celebrate, for your war is eternal!

Breaking the Archetypes

To the uninitiated, fighters are the simpletons of the adventuring world, flailing away with their weapons while taking repeated blows to the head. But those folk know precious little about the specialties and subtleties of this class. Many flavors of fighter exist in the world, and all can fit into an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise in their own way.

Arcane Archer

Those elves really know how to bring the hurt from a distance, don't they? Fortunately for the arrow-slinging world, they were willing to share their arcane archery knowledge with friends, and now every Acq Inc franchise can have its very own magical cannon! As an arcane archer, you're incredibly useful during those tense discussions when someone needs to be able to whistle, and then moments later, arrows appear out of nowhere to stick out of the ground between the feet of the people they're talking to. Roll that next check to negotiate with advantage!

Battle Master

As a battle master involved with an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise, you understand that your maneuvers might not do as much damage as the focused attacks of a less subtle fighter. But the needs of a franchise often call for subtlety and precision over simply busting heads. Add in your knowledge of the more cerebral aspects of combat, including all-important insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy, and it's clear why you make a great addition to any franchise.

Cavalier

An Acquisitions Incorporated franchise is a heady mix of adventuring and business, and both those pursuits require travel. Who better to lead a long road journey than an experienced cavalier with a reliable mount? As a cavalier, you're one of the best warriors around for protecting less hardy allies, even off your mount, making you a mobile fighter, a team player, and a valiant protector.

Champion

Accepting the wisdom of the old adage "Sometimes less is more" is an excellent way to go broke. Because less is less, obviously. Just look at the balance sheet. But there's one exception to that nonrule that can make a big difference in the successful operation of a franchise—the focused, no-frills approach to combat of the champion fighter. As a champion, you quickly master your role within your franchise, because that role is simple. Lift heavy things. Stand in front of monsters. Hit them till they drop.

Eldritch Knight

Fighter? Wizard? Why not both?! If a franchise's recruiting efforts result in a party lacking either fighting or magical ability—or, Tymora forbid, both—you make a great addition to the team as an eldritch knight. Your focus on abjuration and evocation ensures that your fighting style is supported by magic that can either defend allies or deal massive damage to your foes. And if your franchise operation runs true to form, you'll have plenty of opportunity for both.

Samurai

Even if samurai are rare in the lands where Acquisitions Incorporated offers franchise opportunities, their fighting spirit makes them invaluable additions to any franchise—especially if that spirit encompasses the fight for profits. As a samurai, your impressive combat skills are matched by your social grace and wisdom, providing

a boon to your franchise's standing in the community. Any franchise could do worse than having you as its public face—especially when your sense of quiet resolve is needed to quietly resolve some unexpected business disaster.

Monk

Some call the unseen energy flowing through all things "ki." I call it the invisible hand of the marketplace. Now let's negotiate your surrender.

Ki is a magical energy that fills the space between all things in the multiverse. Monks tap into that energy through spiritual and martial training, meditation, and contemplation. And punching and kicking. And more punching and kicking. And maybe a head-butt for good measure.

Monks in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign find a way to integrate a typical ascetic life with the grandeur, majesty, and over-the-top business focus of their franchise. History (real and fantasy) has shown that monasteries don't always shy away from engaging in profitable enterprises. As such, your Acquisitions Incorporated monk likely brings their old monastery's entrepreneurial spirit with them—along with new ideas to energize that spirit even more.

The Business of Applied Ki

In my experience, hiring a monk skilled in the art of peaceful arbitration is the only way to attempt to defuse the rather concussive methods of negotiation employed by many Acquisitions Incorporated franchisees. And if it comes to it, a monk will at least ensure that the concussions are fairly distributed.

—Rosie Beestinger

Stances for Success

Part of your martial training as a monk sees you adopting a variety of stances during combat. These stances help focus your mind, confuse your enemies, and relieve that strain on your lower back.

Subtle Stances

d8	Stance
1	Incontinent Elder—Standing straight, knees together (excellent for surviving those long queues)
2	Addled Adder—Lying flat on the ground (perfect when attempting to hide)
3	Ponderous Pudding—Collapsed in a heap (useful when trying to disguise yourself as a drunken fool)
4	Frightened Gnome—Curled in the fetal position (excellent when about to take a lot of damage)
5	Ambitious Student—Standing with one armed raised (useful when trying to be seen)
6	Boisterous Brewmaster—Hand raised as if making a toast (excellent at preventing being slapped)
7	Hardy Harpy—Arms flapping wildly while singing (inspires people to leave you alone, and good for cooling off on hot days)
8	Broken Bridge—Face down on the ground with knees bent and posterior up (reduces visibility to foes in front, and makes a useful ramp for allies to jump off)

By the Book

The writings of famous monks of the past sometimes become holy texts that come to define entire monastic traditions. The monks of your monastery have dedicated their training and their lives to the insight gleaned from an ancient monastic tome.

Ancient Tomes

d10	Tome
1	*Gambling with the Gods*
2	*Plowshares into Swords*
3	*The Poetry of Flumphism*
4	*Monsters are People Too*
5	*Oracles of the Future*
6	*The Sociable Hermit*
7	*The Enigma of Air*
8	*The Compendium of Limitless Space*
9	*The Organic Sun and Moon Cookbook*
10	*Life is Endless Calamities, What Are You Going to Do About It?*

Ascetic Business Practices

Plenty of monasteries turn out business-minded monks. After all, it's not money that's the root of all evil; it's the love of money. So if you just like money—you know, as a friend—then it's all good! Many Acq Inc franchises actively try to recruit monks into entrepreneurship, knowing of their reputation for versatility both in and out of combat. If you hail from a particularly profitable monastery, you won't need to be convinced of the benefits of a well-run business—you'll already be on board.

Commercial Monasteries

d10	Monastery
1	Monastery of the Eternal Spirits (legendary distillers)
2	House of the Upright Arches (creators of quality footwear)
3	Dome of the Curious Quill (makers of parchment, ink, and writing quills)
4	Crystal Bastion (makers of crystal goblets and ornaments)
5	Monastery Actuary (underwriters of reasonably priced insurance policies)
6	House of Hot Ki (delicious barbecue take-out)
7	Sage's Retreat (custom research services)
8	Monastery of the Wayward Grape (vintners of fine wines)
9	Spider's House Retreat (drow trainers of giant spiders as mounts and companions)
10	Hall of Mysteries (investigators for hire)

Nontraditional Traditions

The diversity of monk traditions makes those traditions different from each other in abilities as well as in attitude. And since an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise runs mostly on attitude, it's important for the philosophy of a monk's monastic tradition to mesh with the philosophy of the franchise.

Way of Shadow

Monks following the Way of Shadow fill an important role in an Acq Inc franchise: that of an infiltrator. As a shadow monk, you're likely more adept than even a rogue at moving around without being seen, slipping into dangerous places unnoticed, and getting away with no one the wiser as to what you've stolen. And it's a safe bet that your fellow franchisees will quickly learn to search the shadows before they say something they don't want you to hear.

Way of the Drunken Master

The most dangerous adventurer in the room is the one that no one knows is an adventurer. As a monk who follows the Way of the Drunken Master, you excel at keeping your true threat level under wraps. Your ability to literally spend days hanging out at the tavern and never be noticed makes you a valuable addition to any franchise that needs to keep its collective eyes and ears on happenings in town. Plus, you're a guaranteed riot at company parties!

Way of the Four Elements

Most enemies who take on a monk expect to get a few punches or kicks for their trouble. So when flames, cold, and thunder come streaking toward them instead, they'll never know what hit them. As a monk of the Way of the Four Elements, you combine the striking power of a typical monk with the versatility of a wizard. Especially in a franchise without a dedicated combat spellcaster, your elemental affinity comes in handy.

Way of the Kensei

Monks following the Way of the Kensei often appear to care more about their weapons than they care about the people around them. Because they do. As a monk following that tradition, you make a perfect fit for a martial-focused franchise. Your skill with weapons makes you an asset in combat, and your practical knowledge makes trading in arms a natural sideline. For you, battle is business and business is always booming.

Way of the Open Hand

It's always nice to have someone in a franchise who can slap an enemy so hard that they shrivel up and die several days after the characters have left town and arranged their alibis. As a monk following the Way of the Open Hand, you know that others think of you as a mysterious figure. You might sit by yourself for hours on end, humming strangely. You might say weird things that you expect others to treat as great wisdom. Frankly, as long as your fellow franchisees can count on you to break skulls when necessary, you can probably get away with anything.

Way of the Sun Soul

Many benevolent monks have a reputation for being all punching and sunshine. As a Sun Soul monk, you epitomize this reputation. Except for the benevolent part. Whenever a fight is in need of area-effect damage, your fellow franchise members understand that you're their best friend in the world. And if your reputation for exploding in anger (literally) makes for easier negotiations with suppliers and business rivals, so much the better.

Paladin

My companions did what!? The screams could be heard from how far away!?

When many hear "paladin," they can't help but envision a knight in shining armor, helping innocent people in distress and living a life of utmost virtue and chastity. Yawn. In the world of Acquisitions Incorporated, at least some small part of a paladin's dedication is focused on the code of business. Morals and ethics are all good. But an Acq Inc paladin knows that nothing puts food on the plates of the poor and roofs over the heads of the dispossessed better than cold, hard cash.

And virtue and chastity are more guidelines than rules anyway. Right?

> Stand up as straight as possible. Being a paladin is mostly about posture, and most people don't realize that. Evil drow slouch, but in this house, we are turgid to the point of discomfort!
>
> —Donaar Blit'zen

Personnel Bodyguard

All life is sacred. Well, some lives are sacred. Okay, fine. The people you protect are sacred. On certain days, everyone else is negotiable. As an Acquisitions Incorporated paladin, you are dedicated to the protection of your fellow franchisees out of loyalty and duty—and because you can't earn all that sweet coin on your own.

In your role as the party's bodyguard, your unmatched training and sense of honor drive you to take untold risks as you put others' lives before your own. Your heavy armor is as fearsome as your heavy morals, and your healing ability, bonuses to saving throws, and lack of fear create a trifecta of comfort. Your natural leadership role also comes into play, as the squishier members of your party come to rely on your presence and protection.

Things Best Left Unsaid

Every character has a few private matters they'd rather not share, but the truth-and-honesty stakes usually aren't as high for others as they are for a paladin. If there's any extra drama in your life, chances are it stems from a terrible secret in your background that you need to constantly struggle to keep. What'll happen if your friends and allies learn of your dark past? How might a sadistic DM put pressure on you throughout the unfolding story to keep your secret at all costs?

Terrible Secrets

d6	Secret
1	Before taking your paladin oath, you accidentally publicly humiliated a good friend. You have sworn to make it up to them, despite them wanting nothing to do with you.
2	You took another person's identity to escape the law in your younger days—and quickly came to realize that this person was far cooler than the real you. If anyone finds out your true identity, your reputation will suffer.
3	You were the child of nobles who were found guilty of stealing vast sums from their subjects. If your identity is discovered, you might be hunted down. But you might also be in line for a massive inheritance.
4	You once belonged to an organization that was eventually banned because a typo in its name made it appear seditious. If anyone discovers this, you run the risk of being mistaken for an enemy of the realm.
5	You made a deal with a fiendish creature to escape trouble or save another character's life. Emissaries of this fiend appear occasionally to tell you that the paperwork regarding the debt you owe is temporarily lost, but they're working on it.
6	You owe an enormous amount of money to a forgetful and amoral person. So far, that person has made no sign of wanting you to repay the debt, and you have no idea what to do about that.

Fixer of Problems

When problems arise as a result of your franchise's operations—and clearly through no fault of your own—you fix those problems as only you can. You excel at remaining calm and attacking each challenge logically and deliberately. Especially comforting to your teammates is your insistence on using a witty catchphrase to raise their spirits in the midst of the greatest danger. Your companions take great pride in your catchphrase, even if they're too shy to admit it.

Legendary Catchphrases

d8	Catchphrase
1	Looks like this is the end. So let's go back to the beginning.
2	There's only one way out of this pickle, and that's by breaking a few jars!
3	Looks like trouble has some vacation time coming up. So let's book it a nice inn.
4	We've got a real game of cat and mouse here ... so it's time to eat some cheese.
5	Is that all I've got?!
6	It's always darkest before the dawn, except when the moon is full. So let's moon!
7	We might be beaten, but we're not beaten! Because "beaten" means different things in both those contexts!
8	"Surrender" is my middle name, but it was a family thing and I never use it!

The Paladin as Fixer

Sowing Your Oaths

The oath that you take (or break) as a paladin defines your character as a center of moral authority in the world. And that works just fine in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, albeit with a few minor adjustments.

Oath of Conquest

Most paladins who take the Oath of Conquest consider martial subjugation the ultimate form of defeat for an enemy. You have a wider view, though, and are able to embrace monetary or business-related conquest as equally fulfilling activities. Is a business rival really all that different from a rampaging dragon? Both are dangerous and antisocial, and both sit on a hoard of wealth that could be yours if you're brave enough to take it.

Oath of Devotion

As a paladin devoted to the ideals of order and justice, you're in a perfect position to guide your franchise to great ends—even as you make an excellent foil for the less-savory plans of your fellow franchisees. Your insistence on dealing with business partners fairly, honoring legally signed contracts, and promoting the general welfare of the world helps you cement your franchise's reputation as a group worth dealing with. It might just take a little bit of convincing for your fellow party members to see things your way.

Oath of Vengeance

The fury brought to bear by an Oath of Vengeance paladin fits well into most Acquisitions Incorporated campaigns. Those who break contracts, renege on deals, fail to repay debts, or otherwise break their word can expect a visit from you in your role as the executor of vengeance. And if your fellow franchisees can make a bit of profit by picking up the pieces when your job is done, then everyone's happy.

Ranger

All that is gold does not glitter. But frankly, if you've got the choice, take the glittering gold every time. That nonshiny stuff loses a ton of resale value.

Loving nature, exploring the wilderness, companioning with animals: most people wouldn't view these things as obvious assets for the rough-and-tumble business of running an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. But most people are wrong about everything. Few Acq Inc franchises set their roots or undertake all their business in urban areas. As such, countless adventures will call a franchise into the wilds, where a qualified ranger makes the difference between forlorn failure and fabulous success. Even when a franchise engages in commerce in the cities and towns of the realm, a ranger's keen senses, sharp blades, and flesh-seeking arrows will never find lack of use.

Control of the Market

The notion of being a defender is core to your identity as a ranger. As a member of Acquisitions Incorporated, you channel your natural proclivity for protectiveness into a razor-sharp focus on the franchise. Pure profit is never an end in and of itself, but whatever deep-seated personal goals you only ever talk about in the dead of night over a dying fire, those goals need financing.

Your role as a defender and a controller of problems makes you a natural leader for sure. Your sense of selflessness and integrity can help shape and guide the more unscrupulous business plans of your allies. Likewise, the other members of your franchise might panic when that crate of *figurines of wondrous power* you acquired turns out to all be self-activating obsidian steeds. But you have the steady nerves and earnest resolve to revert and revise any pear-shaped plans.

> Rangers like to work alone, but it is convenient when others are around to draw the arrows to themselves.
>
> —Môrgæn

Animals are Everywhere

The balance of nature is no less strong within civilization than it is in the wilds, and the streets and sewers of towns and cities are their own thriving ecosystem. As a ranger who spends part of your time in urban settings, you quickly learn to seek out the companionship of some of the many beasts that inhabit those settings.

Urban Beast Friends

d10	Beast
1	Rat
2	Pigeon
3	Skunk
4	Crow
5	Raccoon
6	Possum
7	Snake
8	Toad
9	Giant beetle
10	Lizard

No Weapons Allowed

Your instinctive ability to blend into the natural background has applications even outside the wilderness. During business meetings with rivals or attempts to play nice with the nobility, being forbidden from carrying weapons doesn't slow you down. Whether you channel your enemies' impending destruction through mundane equipment, thoughtful gifts, or a packed lunch, you and your improvised weapons are always ready for action.

Disguised Weapons

d6	Object (Improvised Weapon)
1	The roasted drumstick of a huge bird (greatclub; longsword if a shard of bone is broken off)
2	A long loaf of stale bread (mace)
3	A musical instrument missing all but one string (shortbow)
4	A racket used in a popular sport (handaxe, battleaxe)
5	A metal-tipped crutch (greatsword, spear)
6	A large bottle of wine (mace, shortsword if shattered)

Places to Go

As you do those rangery things you do, you've had the opportunity to travel to many exotic and exciting locales. But there's one place you just keep coming back to.

Points of Interest

d8	Point of Interest
1	A secret cove a few hours' north of town that is a known meeting spot for pirates.
2	A sewer system underneath the local guardhouse.
3	The quaint settlement where you grew up, and where you send most of what you earn adventuring.
4	A caravan of merchants and sellswords that follows a regular route across the land.
5	A temple built to honor a dark god, long abandoned.
6	The final resting place of the ranger who trained you.
7	The shady market known as Gort Jorkle's Afflicted Finery, openly and proudly selling the most illegal things imaginable.
8	An unnamed hill where a ruined tower appears at midnight, then vanishes again at dawn.

A Wide Range of Talents

No matter whether a ranger ranges in the crowded city streets, the trackless wilderness, or the most desolate and confounding planes, all ranger archetypes can find a place in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign.

Beast Master

Any Beast Master understands that a beast companion is far more diligent, friendly, and reliable than most people. This might be doubly true in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, where if you fall in combat, your companion isn't going to assess the resale value of your gear versus the cost of the *potion of healing* it'll take to revive you. Even in an urban setting, a beast companion makes a solid ally, serving as a guard or a scout when you're skulking around places you shouldn't be.

Gloom Stalker

Gloom Stalkers are often best known for their work in the Underdark, but shadows are shadows wherever they occur. As a Gloom Stalker ranger, you find solace and refuge in dark alleys, dimly lit back rooms, and the shadowy corners of any corporate boardroom. Moreover, your expertise as a skulker and an ambush predator fits right in with most franchise business models.

Horizon Walker

Every Acquisitions Incorporated franchise needs to be ready to travel at a moment's notice, with franchisees always rushing headlong into the next amazing opportunity. As a Horizon Walker, you're a master of travel, blazing trails into unknown realms by passing through the even-more-unknown realms of the planes. Whatever path your franchise walks, your combat and magical skill helps ensure a safe journey for you and your companions. Moreover, the unknown reaches of the world are the best places to find new resources, and no one knows more about the unknown than you do.

Hunter

Whether in the wilds, in the cities, or in the wide expanses in between, your specialized combat training as a Hunter ranger makes you a stalwart defender of your franchise and your party. On a mission, you take a lead role in dispensing with threats. In a social encounter, you stand at the back of the room and look dangerous. Just focus on a bit of sensitivity training to counter your predator's instincts and you can be the definitive Acquisitions Incorporated employee—looking smart in a business suit one day, and hacking up enemies the next.

Monster Slayer

The nightmare creatures that haunt the world are more of a threat to an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise than they are to other people. Because frankly, other people have less to lose. Sometimes monsters guard vast amounts of treasure just waiting for acquisition. Other times, they're in the employ of a business rival looking to acquire your wealth, your blood, or your soul. No matter how dark the adventure gets, your role as a Monster Slayer makes you the best offense and defense against whatever stands in your franchise's path to success.

Rogue

I know you went through all those documents pretty quickly. And now you're probably asking yourself, "Wait ... did I sign six addenda or only five?" So you've got to ask yourself one question. "Do I feel properly contractually represented?" Well? Do you, punk?

A rogue is often the backbone of any successful adventuring party, providing an ample amount of martial prowess, a diverse skill set, and a pat on the back for a job well done (with or without a dagger in it). In an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise, a rogue's talents are even more in demand. Not only is the rogue the first one into the dragon's lair and the last one out (after securing away the choicest bits of treasure first), but their keen eye for details and their practiced social skills make them equally invaluable in the boardrooms, the taprooms, and the back alleys where business gets done.

Corporate Espionage

In the world of Acquisitions Incorporated, dangers are as likely to be contractual as physical. Avoiding a trap's pressure plate in a dungeon is good. Avoiding an awkward social situation might be even more important. Explosive runes warding a treasure chest go off once, maybe no one spotted them, big deal. But a rogue who notices a carefully worded legal trap in a contract can save their franchise from lasting harm—and a rogue who can insert such details into someone else's contract is worth their weight in performance bonuses.

Sign of Success

Every rogue has a story about that one big score. With enough ales and a bit of prompting, you can easily be convinced to tell the tale, highlighting all the drama and

Personally, I feel that "rogue" is a little misleading as a term. It implies that those of us who follow a more ... eclectic path toward life can all be grouped into a single category. That works with most other professions because they're good at one thing. But me? I'm good at everything.

You need someone to sweet-talk the town guard? I'm your guy. Impersonate the governor? Easy peasy. Hit the streets for intel? Throw a dinner party? Engage in a clandestine property reassignment? Done and done. And if someone's giving you trouble? Well, let's just say they'll be no trouble to me.

—Viari

derring-do. But the tale is so much better for the telling if you can highlight it with visual aids.

You carry a trophy from that big score, which you pull out when the occasion demands or when you need a reminder of your own skill and luck. Sure, if anyone found the item on you, there's a good chance you could be arrested and convicted of the crime that procured it. But that's part of the excitement, right?

Favorite Trophies

d10	Trophy
1	The handkerchief of a noble's paramour, with their initials sewn into it as well as the date and the place the gift was given. Perfect blackmail fodder.
2	A silver goblet from the kitchens of a castle in a wealthy land. It still smells of the wonderful burgundy that was in it when you stole it.
3	A gold-tipped fountain pen stolen from the breast pocket of a royal wizard.
4	A piece of intricately woven curtain you had to cut to escape a mayor's manor after stealing their valuables.
5	A gray cat with white feet, once the pet of a rich merchant's spoiled child. She almost blew your cover. Now she knows when to keep quiet, and she's great at catching mice.
6	A small statue of a ballerina, broken off from a marble fountain in a city from which you're now banned.
7	A serpentine lapel pin set with tiny diamonds, which you slipped off the chest of a noble whose fete you finessed your way into.
8	The solid-gold hammer holy symbol of that one rude blacksmith who refused to fix your sword.
9	A full potion bottle from the temple of Oghma, marked "Drink in case of emergency." So far, no one has dared you to drink it.
10	A cracked mirror from a mystic's tower, which sometimes shows you a glint of another realm in one of its shards.

Old Business Ties

Many rogues learn their initial skill set through the school of necessity, forced to steal or kill to survive. More advanced talents, however, are generally taught through one of the many criminal guilds that crop up in towns and cities throughout the land. As an Acquisitions Incorporated rogue, you definitely left your guild in order to join a franchise, for no rogue can serve two masters. At least not officially.

Former Guilds

d8	Guild
1	The Tumble Dumplings, an all-halfling guild whose cover identities are acrobats
2	The Char Hawks, whose front operation is a well-known cleaning service
3	The Flattering Butchers, known for their sales of discount meat of unknown provenance
4	The Profane Pilferers, who leave lewd calling cards at the scenes of their crimes
5	The Undead Rangers, whose cover is that they have nothing to do with rangers or the undead
6	The Loyalists, ironically known for breaking contracts at an alarming rate
7	The Robust Vultures, who make use of flying magic for specialty jobs
8	The Quick and the Fred, who all use "Fred" as an alias

Rogues of a Different Feather

Each of the many archetypes of the rogue offers a variety of features that can prove a boon to any Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. You might enjoy making a scene, or you might prefer to pass unseen. You might eliminate your foes in the most public way possible, or prefer to deal with all problems behind closed (and preferably soundproofed) doors. Either way, your talents make you the invaluable linchpin of your franchise's operations.

Arcane Trickster

What does an adventurer who has all the tricks of a rogue need? Even trickier magic! As a rogue of the Arcane Trickster archetype, you supplement your dexterous abilities with spellcasting derring-do. Especially against competitors and enemies who don't know the full extent of your abilities, you make a most daunting foe.

Assassin

Working as an assassin within an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise can be rewarding. Because even as good as the rest of your franchise mates are at killing things, you take that art to the next level. Your top-notch infiltration and disguise skills mean that you'll always be keeping busy. But if you're one of those "You know too much, I have to kill you now, it doesn't matter that I was only asking for directions"-type assassins, you might find that your inherent bloodlust needs to be focused to the subtle enterprises undertaken by the best franchises. So keep calm. Or if you can't, at least keep the killing quiet.

Inquisitive

As an inquisitive, your eye for detail and insightful demeanor complement the skills of the more martial members of an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. Your powers of deduction make it clear that you're the obvious choice to lead your franchise, and you are an able operative in the field as you provide valuable information for ongoing operations. You also have a knack for finding weaknesses in enemies—not only in combat, but in a rival's business plans as well.

Mastermind

Planning, tactics, misdirection, intrigue, sneak attack: it's like the rogue mastermind was specifically built for an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign. Your formidable social skills translate perfectly well from the street to the boardroom, and your ability to read your foes and rivals clearly makes you the best choice for franchise leader. Unfortunately, your equally practiced ability to read your allies means you'll know which of them see themselves as leader. Good thing that's a problem you're perfectly equipped to handle.

Scout

Though many scouts are more comfortable in the wild, the lessons you've learned in the wilderness offer a surprising amount of utility when you're working in cities and towns. Whenever the party needs to go out and engage in some acquisition work, you're at the front of the group, literally and figuratively. Your skills in survival and ensnarement translate nicely to the civilized world, where it's just as much of a challenge to ambush a competitor's caravan as it is to deal with a goblin raiding party.

Swashbuckler

The one-on-one fighting style of a swashbuckler is a perfect fit for the stylish bravado that befits an Acq Inc franchise. Your mobility, audacity, and charm offer versatility in any number of situations, from infiltration, to theft, to fleeing the city guards when the infiltration and theft goes bad. Moreover, your social skills make you equally effective in and out of combat. However, your love of showing off means that you might have to work at not turning every social encounter into a combat encounter just because you can.

Thief

For most people, to be called a thief is among the gravest of insults. For an Acquisitions Incorporated rogue, it's a compliment. You're able to look out for yourself in combat, but are smart enough to instead style yourself as the expert who gets out of trouble just as easily as the rest of the party gets into it. Whether you're picking locks at speed on the way out of a noble's estate or mastering the operation of a strange magic device before it burns your headquarters to the ground, your fellow franchise members always know how lucky they are to have you around. And with your special skills, you'll be able to make sure they show their appreciation financially—whether they know it or not.

Sorcerer

Yes, that's a fine idea. We should totally put that to a vote. Hey, that's weird—my hands are starting to glow. Is anyone else seeing that?

A sorcerer's use of magic runs the range from chaotic to catastrophic—which suits the style of many Acquisitions Incorporated franchises alarmingly well. When a loud and emphatic marketing statement needs to be made using magic, trust a sorcerer to do the talking. And with natural charisma powering their magic, a sorcerer also makes a good public face for a franchise, with their darker or more chaotic tendencies either hidden or amplified depending on need.

The Burden of Leadership

Your natural charisma makes you the obvious choice to be the leader of your franchise. Others look to you constantly for inspiration, even if they're afraid to show it. And that's a good fit for you, because if you can tell others what to do and have them listen to you, it's easier to give the most dangerous frontline tasks to them while you cast from the back and reap the rewards.

With great profit comes great responsibility, however, and it's important to let the other members of your franchise know that they have a place where their opinions matter. It's a place beneath you, sure, but good ideas often trickle upward. It's surprising how often a suggestion made by an underling turns out to be exactly what you were planning on thinking all along. And your understanding of chaos tells you it's easier by far to deal with the so-called law when you have a strong team at your back. Or, even better, at your front, so they're the ones drawing attention to themselves if things go bad.

Focusing with Flair

All sorcerers rely on an arcane focus through which they channel their magic, but traditional focuses lack a singular style. Staffs, orbs, wands, blah, blah. You like to do things differently.

Unusual Arcane Focuses

d10	Focus
1	A stuffed weasel with fake diamonds for eyes
2	A rare gold coin that sparkles as you cast
3	A copper belt buckle created in your own likeness
4	A pair of silver spectacles whose lenses change color based on the school of spell you're casting
5	A well-preserved sausage that smells delicious to you and any other creature nearby
6	A gold harmonica that cranks out a dramatic tune when you cast
7	A shrunken gnome head that blinks and sticks its tongue out occasionally
8	A polo mallet carved in the shape of the tarrasque
9	A flask of liquid that changes color each time you cast
10	The antler stub of a peryton, decorated with nymph hair and pixie dust

Personal Magic

When you cast a spell, you go all in, channeling that magic through body and soul. Often, leftover magic from a casting manifests as a residual effect that can build up over repeated uses of your spells and cantrips. Some residual effects are subtle. Others are obvious to the point of distraction. But any such effect might eventually become a kind of spellcasting signature, ensuring that everyone knows the tenor of your magic as well as they know your name.

Residual Magic

d10	Effect
1	A smell just slightly less noxious than troglodyte musk wafts off you from time to time.
2	At random, your voice shifts three octaves higher or lower than normal.
3	Your hair changes color for 1 hour. If you don't have hair, you grow silver hair that lasts for 1 hour, then falls out.
4	At random, your speech and movement suggest that you are blind drunk.
5	Your eyes glow for 1 minute, cycling intermittently through red, blue, and green.
6	Sometimes when you deal damage to a creature, a disembodied voice near you shouts out, "Boo yah!"
7	Blood momentarily drips from your ears and eyes.
8	Your fingernails grow out to gnarled talons. This new growth falls off after 10 minutes or if you touch something.
9	Intermittently, any somatic components for spells you cast take the form of violent coughing.
10	For 1 minute, you are 6 inches shorter or taller than normal.

Origins Make the Sorcerer

Each sorcerer draws their power from different sources, based on their lineage or their connection to the multiverse. Your own lineage defines much about your place in the world and your approach to magic, and can help you establish your connection to your Acquisitions Incorporated franchise.

Divine Soul

As a divine soul, you have a special place in your franchise. Just as with the child of a wealthy business owner or an heir to a noble throne, your lineage and breeding demand respect, and it's your job to make sure your franchise mates understand that. Your success is ordained by the gods themselves, and you embrace that destiny by mastering the ways of business and adventuring, becoming the best you can be.

Draconic Bloodline

You know those people who seem to just automatically succeed at everything they do, tearing through life like it might be cheap parchment? Of course you do—because you are one. As the scion of mighty dragons, you are the master of everything you set your mind to. Adventuring, espionage, taking credit for your franchise's success—you do it all. And if you ever find yourself out of your depth, you're quick to establish that you're not actually out of your depth at all. You've totally got this!

Shadow Magic

As a shadow sorcerer, your mysterious connection to the Shadowfell makes you a master of social encounters. The sinister laugh, the glowing eyes—nothing makes a clutch negotiation session go quicker. And when negotiations reach an impasse, your connection to the shadow world makes you a valuable tool for spying, infiltration, security, and, of course, killing.

Storm Sorcery

Harnessing the energy of wind and lightning makes you great fun in combat. But as a storm sorcerer, you have even greater utility when your franchise travels overland or across water for business, as you shield allies and important cargo from inclement or dangerous weather. And sure, those allies harp sometimes about your occasional bouts of rage and your proclivity for blowing things up first and asking questions later. But you take it all in stride, because it's not like you have a temper or anything.

Wild Magic

In business, an element of unpredictability is the best means of keeping your franchise one step ahead of the competition—and nobody brings unpredictability like you do. Business plans and long-term strategies are all good, and kudos to your teammates for all their hard work on that stuff. But when a plan needs subtle refinement based on unexpected developments in the marketplace, you're the one who'll thoughtfully tear that plan up, burn it to ash, and just wing it.

Warlock

No, you don't understand. My magic exists outside of any known reality. I wield the power of an entity that dwells beyond space and time. Clearly, none of the profits created by that magic are taxable in this realm.

A warlock can be an authoritative asset to an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise, as their known association with powerful otherworldly forces makes for a great starting point in tough business negotiations. Likewise, a warlock's pact is the definitive binding contract, providing a unique insight into matters of debt and obligation.

The only thing you need to watch out for is making sure your work-life balance is in order. You want to be seen by your staff as the suave, fashionable master of your franchise's occult services, not the creepy weirdo with the glowing eyes always chuckling maniacally to yourself. As convenient as it might seem, remember that interns are not automatically potential sacrifices. Always check the individual contract first.

A diligent, results-minded individual is contracted to perform services for a higher-up, in exchange for career advancement. Have I described the perfect employee, or a warlock? Yes.

—K'thriss Drow'b

Eldritch Affectations

Being beholden to a strange, otherworldly entity gives you a certain style that none can match. Sometimes this style takes the form of an interesting quirk that makes you the memorable master of the dark arts you are.

Otherworldly Quirks

d10	Quirk
1	Every meal you eat must involve copious amounts of raw onions.
2	When you are in a stressful situation, you shout every fourth word you speak.
3	You have a second set of ears that emerge and retract whenever you are actively listening.
4	You can't bear to touch anything valuable without wearing gloves.
5	When you wash or bathe, anything less than uncomfortably hot water feels cold to you.
6	You have to slap some creature roughly before you can get a good night's sleep.
7	You're just not comfortable unless your clothing features garishly contrasting colors or patterns.
8	When you cast a spell, the verbal or somatic component must involve a mild obscenity.
9	Your hair grows so quickly that you must cut it during every short or long rest.
10	When people call you by your correct name, you constantly admonish them by telling them your correct name.

Master of Idiom

As a warlock, you bring every dark aspect of your dark path and darker calling to bear darkly on your franchise's operations. Wrapping yourself in mysterious defensive power or tagging an enemy in the face with *eldritch blast* are just as valuable for corporate espionage as for tomb raiding.

How you present yourself to the world at large is often a subtle reflection of your patron. Being a member of an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise means you have no trouble wearing suitable business apparel to make the right impression. But whether that stylish suit is made from fine Calimshan silk or the flayed skin of fiends is totally up to you.

Marketing Is Everything

There's an old Luskan saying: "They could sell water to a sahuagin and it would come back for a refill." And that's you in a nutshell—using the connections of your pact to sell your skills, your services, and your legend. The right people need to hear about you, and the wrong people need to be completely unaware of your existence. A good motto for yourself (and your franchise, if the other characters are worthy) can be the difference between wasted days in endless taverns waiting for opportunities, and constantly filling your *bag of holding* with the sweetest loot.

Cool Mottos

d6	Motto
1	"I don't break even; I get even."
2	"I'm the prophet of profit, and I've got a prediction for success."
3	"Victory is the finest perfume, and I smell delightful."
4	"Your treasure is my business."
5	"To err is human, so I'm not."
6	"I get the job done rather than thinking up fancy mottos."

Robust Patronage

No matter what your pact, the process of binding yourself to power has prepared you well for life in an Acquisi-

A Warlock's Otherworldly Office

STANDARD DARK SPELLCASTER FRANCHISE RULES

- No summoning circles in the bathroom.
- No "tentacle talk" during mealtimes.
- You must wear a gag at bedtime. That constant screaming makes it hard for everyone else to fall asleep.
- Other party members' rations are for their own consumption, not for sacrificing to dark forces.
- No more declaring, "The sacrament is complete!" at the conclusion of every meeting.
- The bloodstained robes are not an anytime outfit.
- The illusion of eyes on every wall in the headquarters was scary once. Now knock it off.

tions Incorporated franchise. Gathering secret information from the operatives of rival organizations, a bit of well-timed sabotage on some manufacturing equipment, or intimidating contractors into turning their backs on a rival are all regular business for an Acq Inc warlock.

The Archfey

Many folk think of the fey as mysterious sylvan creatures that occasionally get up to harmless pranks. As a warlock of the Archfey, you know better—and are perfectly suited to lay the truth down whenever you can. You and your magic exemplify the duality of light and dark, and your motivations are often as inscrutable as those of your fey master. This can be an advantage when rivals are trying to suss out your plans. But it can be frustrating when allies start harping about, "What are you up to?", and "Why won't you talk to us?", and "Why did you kill those people?" Just tell them anything. It keeps them happy.

The Celestial

As a warlock of the Celestial, you meld the powerful magic of your class with the heavenly attitude of the Upper Planes. Your light-infused, radiant-based power makes it easy to establish trust among franchise mates and customers alike. That false sense of security then comes in handy whenever it's necessary to remind people that being good doesn't necessarily mean being lawful—and that even being lawful leaves a lot of wiggle room.

The Fiend

When people speak of doing deals with the darkness, you know just what they're talking about. As a warlock of the Fiend, you have a ton of experience walking the fine line between light and shadow. Or, you know, walking the shadow but being pretty sure the light is over there somewhere. As such, you're the perfect person to take point when your franchise needs to get down and dirty to succeed.

The Great Old One

Everybody's met that one mind-addled poet at the end of the bar spouting all kinds of nonsense. But only you can really appreciate the truth of what they're talking about. As a warlock of the Great Old One, you harness the power of unreality and madness for the benefit of your franchise. You are known for consistently offering up plans and advice that go outside the box. Way, way outside. And when your plans turn to profit, your franchise partners are thankfully there to take care of all that balance-sheet-and-coffer practical stuff. You're more about the big insane ideas, really.

The Hexblade

As a warlock of the Hexblade, you dwell always within the realm of the disturbing and the unknown. But wow, is it worth it. Your ability to focus power through your weapons makes you a perfect franchise enforcer. Your aptitude for cursing, hexes, and dark magic makes you a skilled negotiator. And your ability to create spectral interns makes you a personnel manager's dream.

Wizard

Yes, I can get you inside that vault. I can locate that secret treasure you're all hyped up about. I can get you out with no collateral damage. I'm fine if you care less about the "no collateral damage" thing. Now let's get down to business.

The utility that a wizard brings to an Acquisitions Incorporated operation is obvious to franchise members, staff, clients, and rivals alike. Defensive spells, arcane travel rituals, eldritch utility magic—a wizard does it all. Plus, they'll blow things up when needed. And not surprisingly, things in an Acq Inc campaign need to get blown up a lot.

It's easy to make the case that arcane magic is the most valuable component in any franchise business plan or strategic road map. And as a wizard, you're the premium vendor of advantageous arcane services. Just make sure that staff and intern contracts have strong language regarding the risk of friendly fire. But in the small print, way down there at the bottom.

Eldritch Utility

Though wizard encompasses a single class, the study of arcane magic lends itself to a broad range of specialization. As such, it's not enough to simply dedicate yourself to being the best wizard you can be. It's about figuring out which wizardly path best addresses your franchise's potential needs.

Enchanters and illusionists in the service of a franchise can boggle the minds of enemies and allies. Transmuters, conjurers, and necromancers ensure that franchise members always have the right tool or monster for the job. Abjurers and diviners can help avoid catastrophic events before they happen. And evokers and war mages? No one needs to be reminded of the simple yet devastating majesty of a *fireball* spell. Well, they don't need to be reminded more than once.

Nightmare Magic

Your use of magic is always clean and precise. Still, tapping directly into the Weave to reshape reality or burn it to the ground has an eventual effect on the mind, and your sleep is often haunted by a recurring nightmare whose indelible images you cannot shake.

No wizard will ever take offense to a polite round of applause from the rest of the party after a particularly well-crafted spell.

—Jim Darkmagic

THE MAGIC OF MONEY

Lingering Nightmares

d6	Nightmare
1	You stand atop a cliff as an apocalyptic sea monster emerges and begins painting the world around you with a brush in each tentacle. You cannot escape its attention, but wake up just before you are recolored.
2	You dream about walking on pieces of paper, each of which is scribed with the word "eggshells." This is written in multiple languages, some of which you can't read.
3	You are giving the most important presentation of your career, and the magic you are using to create an impressive visual display has gone haywire. It now displays an illusory image of you wearing nothing but a strategically placed scarf.
4	A franchise staff member has gained a huge inheritance and retired. A note signed by you indicates that you withdrew the same huge amount of cash from company accounts the day before, but you have no memory of doing so.
5	You feel the pleasant tickling of feathers, then look up to find a cockatrice preening on your chest.
6	All your pockets have been torn open, but you can't stop placing valuable objects in them. Each time an object falls out of a pocket, you pick it up, then put it in a pocket again.

Learning from the Best

Over the long years of study it took you to become a wizard, the arcane master you studied under left an indelible mark on you. Possibly a physical one. Kind or cruel, exacting or eccentric, this teacher shaped you during your apprentice days in profound and probably disturbing ways. Whether a typical mage wearing a pointy hat and dwelling in a remote tower, a bespectacled bookworm lurking in a dusty library, or an eldritch maniac with personal habits you're not comfortable talking about, your master made you the wizard you are today.

Arcane Masters

d8	Master
1	Philia Fjor, a half-elf abjurer who baked cupcakes that functioned as potions.
2	Oghhga, a mute half-orc diviner who beat her unsuccessful students to death with rocks.
3	Impler Rickys, a gnome transmuter who lived under a bridge and worked for candied beets and honey peanuts.
4	Dame Melna Rothburntonberryville, a 238-year-old elf croquet player and evoker, and hero of the first, second, third, fifth, and sixth Troll Wars. (She was out on maternity leave during the fourth.)
5	Fernstern Drockburn, a deep gnome ventriloquist and conjurer, and his "dummy" Vinceroy, an imp familiar in a puppet suit.
6	Loa Hatt, a tiefling illusionist and cobbler, whose rumored dealings with devils led to many jokes about fixing soles while destroying souls.
7	Reni the Hare, a halfling enchanter with an odd fondness for carrots. You ate a lot of carrots as an apprentice. You don't much like carrots anymore.
8	Sylvester Delague, a human necromancer whose greatest possession was a portrait painted by an ex-student, said to capture his green eyes perfectly. In truth, Sylvester was color-blind, and the portrait's eyes are bloodshot red. No one ever told him.

Matriculating from the Schools of Magic

With so many schools of magic available to wizards, each type of specialization brings a different set of skills and strengths to a franchise. Your chosen school can help define your role in the business, as well as your fellow franchise members' expectations for you.

Abjuration

Protective magic is often underappreciated by the members of the lesser character classes, with their focus on dealing the most damage in the flashiest way possible. But in an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise, where property and real estate need protection as much as the party members, your role as an abjurer is always greatly appreciated. Just don't make the rookie mistake of protecting everybody else before you take care of yourself and the goods. And if you need to reserve

some spell slots before the rest of the party has been made sufficiently invulnerable? Hey, that's what potions are for.

Conjuration

The ability to make something from nothing is the greatest business plan ever developed—and that plan has your name all over it. As a conjurer, your utility to your franchise knows no bounds, whether you're creating the right tool for the job, summoning creatures for scouting or guard duty, or using *dimension door* to slip away from a deal gone bad. The hard part of that last one is always figuring out which of your franchise mates you'll bring with you. Who's been particularly nice to you lately?

Divination

Seers and soothsayers abound in the world, but most ply their trade only to take advantage of the credulous and the desperate. You possess the true gift of the diviner, able to tap into the flow of time to read portents of the future. Your divinations help negate the risks for your franchise, whether in business deals or dangerous treasure extractions. And sure, working on the credulous and the desperate is sometimes part of the plan. But when you do it, it's done with professional flare.

Enchantment

Trust. Community outreach. Social awareness. These things are important to every business, and as an enchanter, it's your job to ensure that your Acquisitions Incorporated franchise is synonymous with these concepts. Whether they're actually present in the franchise or not. When it comes down to it, having friends is an equally valuable asset in adventuring and business, and being able to turn enemies, rivals, and angry mobs into friends even for a short while can make a difference.

Evocation

As an evoker, you understand the wisdom of the adage, "Speak softly and carry a big wand." As a member of Acquisitions Incorporated, you also know that the speaking softly part is entirely optional, contractually speaking. When your franchise needs firepower, you bring the damage and spread it in flashy, dramatic fashion. This works out great in the dungeon, and sometimes even at outdoor social events that don't feature a lot of flammable buildings nearby. In the boardroom or the council chamber, your skills are likely in less demand, but just knowing you're there can help keep the noble or the business magnate across the table fully engaged. Because as long as you are there, they know they're safe from having you burning their holdings to the ground.

Illusion

Success in business, as in combat, can often hinge on split-second decisions. As an illusionist, you have mastered the art of confounding the senses, leaving enemies, rivals, and customers uncertain as to what's real and what isn't. Once you convince those around you that they can't trust what they see or hear, that's a perfect opportunity to give them your preferred version of what's going on. Whether it's obscuring contracts, concealing incursions, or manifesting imaginary staff members to take the fall for your partners' misdeeds, your magic helps put the best possible illusory face on your franchise.

Necromancy

As a necromancer, you've always had an easy time making friends. Hah! That's hilarious because your friends are undead. But not everyone else in your franchise sees the lighter side of your magical craft. Clearly, the labor-to-paid-benefits ratio of undead interns can't be beat, but you need to be cognizant of the potential public-relations nightmare of franchise-branded zombies running amok. Still, if things get bad, there's nothing like a general marketing campaign reminding local folk that necromancy means *raise dead*. Even if you can't cast it.

Transmutation

As a transmuter, you practice one of the most subtle forms of magic—the transfiguration of one material substance into another. But let's be honest, your role in your franchise is going to be mostly about combat and ability buffs, and, "Hey, why haven't you learned how to turn lead into gold yet?" You take it in stride, though, because you understand that the long game is entirely about you. This franchise needs to be transformed from a chaotic mishmash of dysfunctional personalities and clashing goals into a well-tuned engine of commerce. And no one does transformation quite like you do.

War Magic

Success in business requires prudent caution and take-charge offense in equal measure. As a war mage, your focus on abjuration and evocation is thus a good fit for success. Many war mages feel it their duty to waste their lives (sometimes literally) on the battlefield. But you specialize in the more subtle conflicts of the marketplace, where you can take your skills to a whole new level. You cast spells under pressure, never blinking in the face of death or financial ruin. And when it's necessary, you can blow up an adversary like nobody's business. Just make sure your franchise's collateral damage insurance is all up to date.

New Race: Verdan

The verdan owe their existence to chaos. Descended and transformed from a large clan of goblins and hobgoblins, those who became the verdan were simply living their lives, doing goblinoid things. But then passing through the shadow of That-Which-Endures changed them forever. Now the newest race to call Faerûn home, the verdan do their best to find their way in an unfamiliar world.

> Reality is a descent into chaos punctuated by brief flashes of order, whence we arose and so imagine it to be the norm rather than a distant outlier. That-Which-Endures held entropy back for a mere instant, and the Verdan emerged. I'm sorry, was that the question?
>
> —K'thriss Drow'b

Created by Chaos

When the power of That-Which-Endures mutated the verdan, their skin was turned the color of jade and their blood began to flow black. Their ears grew pointed, and they gained a limited form of telepathy—but at the cost of forgetting their history. The underground homes of the goblins were places of terror to the new creatures those goblins became, and the verdan quickly fled to the surface and into the sunlight.

When they arrived in the new lands of the surface, the verdan found that they were often mistaken for smaller, green-skinned half-elves. Attracting curiosity but no real questions, they have thus been able to make their way reasonably freely in the world.

Ongoing Mutations

Because the verdan have not dwelled long in the world, they are still discovering new things about themselves. Chief among these discoveries is that their physical forms change as they age, signifying that the mutative power of That-Which-Endures is not done with them. The first verdan emerged from the Underdark as creatures of goblin stature. But they soon learned that their kind were fated to eventually undergo a dramatic, painful, and random growth spurt that sees them transformed to hobgoblin size over a period of days.

At the same time, many verdan undergo changes in coloring as they age. Male verdan typically have little to no hair, while females sport shocks of wiry hair that they try to tame in a variety of styles. But the color of any verdan's hair, skin, and eyes can transform from their original jade tones to pale white, deep ebon, or any other shade in between. A verdan's ears also undergo numerous spontaneous alterations over their lifetime, from the typical range of point and peak seen among the elves, to huge ears that sweep back from the head like wings, and which are often pierced behind the head with a single ring to keep them from flapping about.

Changes in gender are also a known and accepted part of verdan life. These fluid aspects of form and identity are seen as blessings, allowing an individual to experience more of the world and grow in empathy and understanding. There is no pattern to any verdan's mutations, as verdan from the same family can shift in drastically different ways. The verdan assign no cultural or biological relevance to any particular coloration, physical features, or gender.

Cultural Chameleons

The clan homes of the Underdark goblinoids who became the verdan covered an enormous area. As the verdan fled to the surface world, they emerged in culturally diverse locations. Some found themselves near dwarven strongholds, others near elven enclaves, and others near the widespread human settlements of Faerûn.

That-Which-Endures

That-Which-Endures is a nameless, faceless, mysterious entity, something between a multiverse-spanning primordial spirit and an over-god. It represents the amoral and all-encompassing power of entropy—the force that unknowingly and uncaringly changes order into chaos, and that breaks matter and time down into its component parts so that all can be rebuilt. Some who study this entity claim that it is clearly evil and destructive. Others call it simply a necessary part of the cycle of death and rebirth. In the end, though, That-Which-Endures shows precious little interest in what people say about it.

Varieties of Adult Verdan

Without a cultural identity or memory of their own, the verdan quickly adopted the cultural practices of the areas into which they migrated. Still, a sense of not truly belonging is felt even by verdan who have been welcomed into other cultures. They are often stricken with wanderlust, keeping their possessions limited and easily portable. It is not unusual to see individual verdan or whole families trooping along the roads of the world with their tents and belongings strapped to their backs.

Even when they are happily steeped in a culture, the verdan remain on the lookout for oppression and curtailment of freedoms. They understand the need for laws that protect, but they rail against laws that restrict and oppress—especially those designed to protect the power and wealth of the elite. When living among enlightened folk, verdan are still the first to speak out against cultural restraints on individuals, particularly those based on physical characteristics such as gender, race, or appearance.

Wide-Eyed and Curious

Verdan are hungry to undertake new challenges and absorb new experiences. When they meet other verdan who have traveled to different parts of the world, they drop everything to spend as long as possible sharing stories and observations from their respective travels. However, their inexperience in the world and their racial amnesia sometimes lends the verdan a kind of innocence that works against them. Some are credulous and easily fooled by hucksters, but most verdan have an intuition bred by empathy that helps them eventually sort out those who are sincere from those who are not.

Verdan Names

The oldest verdan names spring from goblinoid traditions, but more recent names reflect the character of the different cultures these folk have encountered since coming out into the sunlight. When a group of verdan live near dwarves, they might take on more dwarven-sounding names, only to change those names when they wander into a human area. A verdan is also not hesitant to change their name as their physical appearance changes—or, indeed, whenever the mood strikes them.

Verdan make no differentiation between male, female, and family names, and often eschew family names altogether.

Verdan Names: Bronn, Crahma, Dolar, Dreeda, Duglee, Gruvald, Hulm, Jeal, Kalo, Klesh, Korm, Lathi, Ovlig, Paracii, Pils, Praet, Promul, Reezni, Rin, Shylk, Slyra, Sollo, Stalsii, Stromvo, Stussa, Syrkart, Takat, Toit, Tubyna, Varr, Veriga, Wraq, Wural, Wurxee

Underlying Improvements

When a verdan character gains an ability score improvement at certain levels, that increase can be tied to a physical mutation at the player's determination. A boost to Strength might be accompanied by a growth spurt and the development of rippling muscle, while an increase in Intelligence might produce a stylishly large forehead.

Verdan Traits

Verdan characters have a number of traits in common with others of their kind.

Ability Score Increase. Your Constitution score increases by 1, and your Charisma score increases by 2.

Age. Verdan reach adulthood at around the age of 24, and it is thought that they might live to nearly 200 years old. However, because no verdan has died of old age since the race's initial creation, their upper age limits remain subject to speculation.

Alignment. Verdan are generally good, although their absence of racial identity and shared history can sometimes see individual verdan become untethered from any moral or ethical framework.

Size. Verdan start out similar in size to the goblins they were created from, ranging from 3 to 4 feet in height. But at some point after reaching maturity, each verdan undergoes a sudden growth spurt of 2 feet or more. At 1st level, you are a Small creature. When you reach 5th level, you become a Medium creature.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Black Blood Healing. The black blood that is a sign of your people's connection to That-Which-Endures boosts your natural healing. When you roll a 1 or 2 on any Hit Die you spend at the end of a short rest, you can reroll the die and must use the new roll.

Limited Telepathy. You can telepathically speak to any creature you can see within 30 feet of you. You don't need to share a language with the creature for it to understand your telepathy, but it must be able to understand at least one language. This process of communication is slow and limited, allowing you to transmit and receive only simple ideas and straightforward concepts.

Persuasive. Your people's lack of history makes you trustworthy and humble. You have proficiency in the Persuasion skill.

Telepathic Insight. Your mind's connection to the world around you strengthens your will. You have advantage on all Wisdom and Charisma saving throws.

Languages. You speak, read, and write Common, Goblin, and one additional language of your choice. This language typically has some connection to one of the areas or cultures that has been part of your life.

New Spells

Magic is power and power is profit—which makes spellcasting just another part of the expansive business model of Acquisitions Incorporated. Magical research and development is a big part of day-to-day operations at Head Office, whose spellcasting staff toil day in and day out to come up with the very latest in eldritch improvements.

Many of their developments remain closely guarded secrets, known only to the company's highest-ranking employees, and ready to be whipped out at a suitably dramatic moment. But every once in a while, a unique spell makes its way through the ranks of the company's

I don't do magic. I am magic.

—Jim Darkmagic

casters and into the world at large. Some of these spells are alterations of old classics, while others bend the magical energy of the multiverse in new and exciting ways.

Distort Value

1st-level illusion

Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: Touch
Components: V
Duration: 8 hours

Do you need to squeeze a few more gold pieces out of a merchant as you try to sell that weird octopus statue you liberated from the chaos temple? Do you need to downplay the worth of some magical assets when the tax collector stops by? *Distort value* has you covered.

You cast this spell on an object no more than 1 foot on a side, doubling the object's perceived value by adding illusory flourishes or polish to it, or reducing its perceived value by half with the help of illusory scratches, dents, and other unsightly features. Anyone examining the object can ascertain its true value with a successful Intelligence (Investigation) check against your spell save DC.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the maximum size of the object increases by 1 foot for each slot level above 1st.

KRIS STRAUB

Jim's magic missile is an ancient and powerful spell, as well as being the name of my band in Wizard Academy.

—Jim Darkmagic

Fast Friends

3rd-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

When you need to make sure something gets done, you can't rely on vague promises, sworn oaths, or binding contracts of employment. When you cast this spell, choose one humanoid within range that can see and hear you, and that can understand you. The creature must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by you for the duration. While the creature is charmed in this way, it undertakes to perform any services or activities you ask of it in a friendly manner, to the best of its ability.

You can set the creature new tasks when a previous task is completed, or if you decide to end its current task. If the service or activity might cause harm to the creature, or if it conflicts with the creature's normal activities and desires, the creature can make another Wisdom saving throw to try to end the effect. This save is made with advantage if you or your companions are fighting the creature. If the activity would result in certain death for the creature, the spell ends.

When the spell ends, the creature knows it was charmed by you.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, you can target one additional creature for each slot level above 3rd.

Spells by Class

You're free to pitch the DM on allowing any class access to these new spells if they seem a good thematic fit for your character, as befits the wide-open, laissez-faire nature of an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign. For a more traditional approach, consider the following allocation.

Bard Spells
1st level: *distort value*
2nd level: *gift of gab*
3rd level: *fast friends, motivational speech*

Cleric Spells
3rd level: *fast friends, incite greed, motivational speech*

Sorcerer Spells
1st level: *distort value*
3rd level: *incite greed*

Wizard Spells
1st level: *distort value, Jim's magic missile*
2nd level: *gift of gab, Jim's glowing coin*
3rd level: *fast friends, incite greed*

Warlock Spells
1st level: *distort value*
3rd level: *incite greed*

When I met Jim Darkmagic, I wondered how he got anything done in that outfit. I have since learned that most of his talents involve standing and talking. His outfit is perfect for that.

—Môrgæn

Gift of Gab

2nd-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take when you speak to another creature
Range: Self
Components: V, S, R (2 gp)
Duration: Instantaneous

Jim Darkmagic is said to have invented this spell, originally calling it *I said what?!* Have you ever been talking to the local monarch and accidentally mentioned how their son looks like your favorite hog from when you were growing up on the family farm? We've all been there! But rather than being beheaded for an honest slip of the tongue, you can pretend it never happened—by ensuring that no one knows it happened.

When you cast this spell, you skillfully reshape the memories of listeners in your immediate area, so that each creature of your choice within 5 feet of you forgets everything you said within the last 6 seconds. Those creatures then remember that you actually said the words you speak as the verbal component of the spell.

Incite Greed

3rd-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (a gem worth at least 50 gp)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

When you cast this spell, you present the gem used as the material component and choose any number of creatures within range that can see you. Each target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by you until the spell ends, or until you or your companions do anything harmful to it. While charmed in this way, a creature can do nothing but use its movement to approach you in a safe manner. While an affected creature is within 5 feet of you, it cannot move, but simply stares greedily at the gem you present.

At the end of each of its turns, an affected target can make a Wisdom saving throw. If it succeeds, this effect ends for that target.

Jim's Glowing Coin

2nd-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: S, M (a coin), R (2 gp)
Duration: 1 minute

Of the many tactics employed by master magician and renowned adventurer Jim Darkmagic, the old glowing coin trick is a time-honored classic. When you cast the spell, you hurl the coin that is the spell's material component to any spot within range. The coin lights up as if under the effect of a *light* spell. Each creature of your choice that you can see within 30 feet of the coin must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or be distracted for the duration. While distracted, a creature has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and initiative rolls.

Royalty Component

Jim Darkmagic's unique brand of spellcasting mixes arcane expertise with a particular kind of pecuniary fervor. New spells originally developed by Jim spawned a new type of spell component, which has since spread to other spells created by employees and franchisees of Acquisitions Incorporated: the royalty component.

To cast a spell that employs a royalty component (including using a *spell scroll* or other magic item that stores such a spell), a caster must have sufficient funds on their person. The cost of the casting is set by the caster who creates the spell, but is typically 1 gp per spell slot level. When the spell is cast, the royalty is magically transported to a coffer or other object designated by the creating spellcaster. This payment is made whether the caster using the spell is aware of the royalty component or not. If the caster does not have sufficient funds, the spell is not lost but it cannot be cast.

Though many casters have tried to circumvent the royalty component, none have ever fully succeeded. However, it is said that a character can attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check while casting a spell with a royalty component. With a successful check, the payment is taken from a random creature within 10 feet of the caster, without that creature's knowledge.

Jim's Magic Missile

1st-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 120 feet
Components: V, S, R (1 gp)
Duration: Instantaneous

Any apprentice wizard can cast a boring old *magic missile*. Sure, it always strikes its target. Yawn. Do away with the drudgery of your grandfather's magic with this improved version of the spell, as used by Jim Darkmagic!

You create three twisting, whistling, hypoallergenic, gluten-free darts of magical force. Each dart targets a creature of your choice that you can see within range. Make a ranged spell attack for each missile. On a hit, a missile deals 2d4 force damage to its target.

If the attack roll scores a critical hit, the target of that missile takes 5d4 force damage instead of you rolling damage twice for a critical hit. If the attack roll for any missile is a 1, all missiles miss their targets and blow up in your face, dealing 1 force damage per missile to you.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the spell creates one more dart, and the royalty component increases by 1 gp, for each slot level above 1st.

I once heard a motivational speech by Jim and it was the worst ninety seconds of my life. What does Omin see in him, anyway?

—Walnut Dankgrass

Motivational Speech

3rd-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: 60 feet
Components: V
Duration: 1 hour

You address allies, staff, or innocent bystanders to exhort and inspire them to greatness, whether they have anything to get excited about or not. Choose up to five creatures within range that can hear you. For the duration, each affected creature gains 5 temporary hit points and has advantage on Wisdom saving throws. If an affected creature is hit by an attack, it has advantage on the next attack roll it makes. Once an affected creature loses the temporary hit points granted by this spell, the spell ends for that creature.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the temporary hit points increase by 5 for each slot level above 3rd.

Factions and Rivals

Other books detail the many power groups and factions that operate in Faerûn and the Sword Coast (including the *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*). But a number of new factions and entrepreneurial enterprises are central to an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign—starting with the group that an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign is actually named after.

Acquisitions Incorporated

Sometimes a group of heroes comes together in a way that changes the paradigm forever. A group so magnificent, so powerful, so larcenous, that adventuring has never been the same since. For years now, that group has been Acquisitions Incorporated.

The brainchild of company founder Ominifis Hereward Dran, Acq Inc has consistently maintained a position at the bleeding edge of adventuring technology, processes, and marketing. The staff of Acquisitions Incorporated, including the company's highly varied roster of inexpensive interns, engage in all aspects of adventuring. Salvage, infiltration, legally sanctioned life shortening, property redistribution, protection, removing protection, merchandising—Acq Inc does it all.

As Acquisitions Incorporated has grown, so too have the opportunities provided by that organization to neophyte adventurers looking for an advantage in the rough-and-tumble world of professional dungeoneering. From its humble beginnings in the basement of the Silver Unicorn Inn in Fallcrest, Acq Inc has become the only place to intern, boasting franchise opportunities that can propel struggling adventurers into the big leagues.

> At Acquisitions Incorporated, you inquire—and we acquire™. For more than a decade, other people have had things you've really wanted, and we've gone over there to get those things even if they didn't want us to do that. Typically, they don't. But we don't work for them, we work for you™. We've acquired it all, but we specialize in staffs, gems, and storied weapons of great lineage. We do apply a reasonable surtax for rods, because rods. It's been a problem. This is Acq Inc in a nutshell: Defenses negotiable. Merchandise plentiful. Franchises available.
>
> —Omin Dran

Dran Enterprises

Dran Enterprises is the biggest rival of Acquisitions Incorporated—and has the strongest possible connection to that august organization. Founded by a false version of Auspicia Dran (Omin Dran's sister, claimed by the creature known as the Wandering Crypt), Dran Enterprises has a well-established goal of wanting to take over Acquisitions Incorporated at any cost, even as the organization profits from the endeavors of Acq Inc employees and associates. Dran Enterprises' strategy for accomplishing this goal is built around providing adventuring services even more ruthlessly and efficiently than Acq Inc. Hostile takeovers, brutal rounds of downsizing, corporate espionage, and highly unethical behavior are just the most obvious of the company's many tools.

With the death of the false Auspicia, Dran Enterprises was taken over by Omin's other sister, Portentia, who had operated in the shadows of the organization for some time beforehand. Certain personal secrets no doubt drive Portentia's single-minded focus for Dran Enterprises, but those have yet to be revealed. (To most people, at least. DMs can check out appendix A for more information.) In the meantime, the organization focuses on besting Acquisitions Incorporated at its own game while growing ever more powerful—and eventually reaching the point where a corporate takeover of Acq Inc can no longer be thwarted.

> They say acquisition is a family business, and it's certainly true for those of my house. I hadn't seen my sister, Auspicia Dran, for years. Decades, in fact. And then out of nowhere, she returns with fresh branding and despicably evil backing, trying to acquire Acquisitions Incorporated. Being acquired ourselves is definitely not on brand, and I have definitely refused this offer. But I would like to know what the dental plans are like at Dran Enterprises, for a completely separate and unrelated reason.
>
> —Omin Dran

FRANCISCO VILLASENOR, DORA LITTERELL

Members of the Noble Knife are said to be able to carve their symbol into surfaces and "pry" reality in such a way that they can hide in it or escape through it. Though that seems pretty suspect if you ask me. They often work in pairs, with an assassin or observer paired with a "tame mimic." Those mimics can take any object shape, as is normal for their abnormal kind, but are also able to transform into strange dogs that say "woof." Not that they bark. They say "woof" like a person would. Unless you were a member of the faction, you'd almost never see two teams in the same place at the same time—unless they had been given opposite tasks for some reason. If that's the case, get out of there quick, because whatever happens next isn't going to be pleasant.

—Omin Dran

The Noble Knife

The Noble Knife is a somewhat mysterious organization known for its high level of engagement with the cultures and societies within which its members work. Having made such engagements, the loyalists of the Noble Knife are watchful for signs of leaders and power brokers making the first transition to tyranny—at which point, those newly minted tyrants are quickly assassinated for the greater good. The organization doesn't "take jobs" as such. Rather, its leadership assesses the moral and political landscape of the realm and selects targets thusly.

The Noble Knife is named for its members' weapon of choice for their trademark deed. Similar to an *arrow of slaying*, a *noble knife* is a weapon whose magic is focused on killing a specific individual. The crafting of a *noble knife* is undertaken by a collective of artisans, and requires a range of exotic materials and components. Additionally, the act of creation takes twenty or more years off the lead artisan's life. It goes without saying that the Noble Knife is chock full of true believers.

The Silver Sliver

In a world driven by gold, magic, and power, organizations that fly in the face of all three of those things are hard to understand. Doing good and seeking justice is all well and fine. But if there's no money changing hands, how do you measure the value of the work?

The Silver Sliver exemplifies what goes wrong when good people fail to grasp the complexities of the world. They go around wearing masks, acting all heroically willy-nilly, righting wrongs and defending the weak ... for no profit whatsoever! That brand of zealotry is dangerous, because you can't trust anyone who won't sometimes do a dishonest day's work for an honest day's wage.

The Six are a new player on the scene, which, to me, implies inexperience. Do you want to entrust your next acquisition to an agile new team? Actually, don't answer that. They have some kind of beef with Acquisitions Incorporated. I know that because they hand out pamphlets with my face on them, and there's one of those circles with the slash through it. Seems bad. Also, there's something about their logo I don't like ... but I can't put my finger on it. People are saying they're weird and gross, and who am I to say otherwise?

—Omin Dran

The Six

Any successful adventuring party makes enemies along the way. Defeated foes, unhappy or jealous allies, disillusioned associates or hirelings—it's a long list. And a group as storied and reckless as Acquisitions Incorporated was always destined to break more than a few eggs while making their delicious brand of adventuring omelet.

The Six is a group of just such enemies—characters who were left hurt, underappreciated, or even dead in the wake of Acq Inc's magnificent achievements. Whether the Six are really six, or fewer, or more, remains to be seen. The organization's primary public goal appears to be revenge in the form of the downfall of Omin Dran and Acquisitions Incorporated, but who or what is truly behind the group—and what other sinister vendettas they might cling to—remains a mystery. Still, there's a good chance it's got something to do with destroying the world by unleashing the power of the Far Realm. (Sorry; "Spoilers!")

I feel like making your company's name a tongue twister is a bold move in this marketplace. I wouldn't have done that. I've told the Silver Sliver on multiple occasions that I'm available for consulting on things like this. No response, though. The organization is said to be headed up by someone named Glimmr Violente: a woman devoted to not just the cause of justice in the abstract, but the literal application of justice via a scimitar. Her band of true believers do the whole shiny mask thing and don't charge for their services ... which is another thing I wouldn't do.

—Omin Dran

GAVIN GRECO, DORA LITTRELL, FRANCISCO VILLASEÑOR, KLAUS PILLON

Chapter 4: The Orrery of the Wanderer

This chapter presents a complete Acquisitions Incorporated adventure divided into six episodes. Episode 1 is for players using shiny new 1st-level characters. They're ready to take on the world and hoping to become part-owners of a share in a valuable, prestigious Acquisitions Incorporated franchise—or at least gain a coveted internship with the organization.

At the end of each episode, characters gain a level. Each episode is an appropriate challenge for a party of four characters of the indicated level, but that challenge can be modified to accommodate your group. At the end of the sixth and final episode, the characters attain 7th level. But even more importantly, they will be fully vested in an operational and maybe even profitable Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. After that, the players and characters can take their treasure-hunting activities in any direction that you and they desire.

Between episodes, characters will use downtime to undertake a variety of activities to better themselves or their franchise. By later episodes, choices of downtime activities might alter the flow and challenge of the story. After all, there's no rest for the wicked, so there shouldn't be rest for heroes either. (Logically then, wicked heroes would need to work twice as hard. Budget the time.) Familiarize yourself with the new activities presented in "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" in chapter 2 of this book, and with the standard D&D downtime activities discussed in that section.

The *Monster Manual* contains stat blocks for most of the creatures found in this adventure. All the necessary stat blocks are included there or in appendix B. When a creature's name appears in **bold** type, that's a visual cue for you to look up the creature's stat block in the *Monster Manual* or the monster appendix in this book.

Spells and equipment mentioned in the adventure are described in the *Player's Handbook*. Magic items are described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, except for the *Orrery of the Wanderer* and its components, described in appendix D.

No Players Allowed

This part of the book is for the DM only. If you're planning to run through the adventure as a player, stop reading now! Unless you want to keep going, that is. Because seriously, it's not like anyone's going to stop you. After all, information is power—in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, and in life. Maybe you having a bit of an inside track is just what this adventure needs to make it really pop, and to keep the DM from getting all, "Ooh, look at me! I'm the one with the secrets!" I mean, can you believe how smug they are? It's like they're just begging you to turn the page ...

Running an Acquisitions Incorporated Campaign

The grand buffet that is an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign features plenty of the exciting locations and high adventure common to all great fantasy campaigns. But an Acq Inc game adds a unique helping of humor and corporate intrigue to the mix, creating a rich narrative familiar to anyone who's watched an Acquisitions Incorporated livestream game. To take full advantage of the potential of an Acq Inc campaign, keep the following concepts in mind.

Familiar Faces

This campaign provides many NPCs for you to do with as you please. They all have roles to play in the encounters and events of the adventure, but what happens to them after that is up to you. Every NPC could be a potential ally, enemy, or foil later in the campaign. If the players take a shine to one, bring that character back—or better yet, make the NPC an integral part of the ongoing plot. All franchises need servants and hirelings to do mundane jobs, and NPCs the characters already know are a great fit for these roles. Employ these NPCs to make the world feel more familiar and real to the players and characters alike.

Right and Wrong

Even the most heroic heroes sometimes fall short. And in many cases, adventurers aren't even within longbow range of "virtuous" in their motivations. As such, what the characters fail to do, do poorly, or do wrongly can be just as important as what they accomplish. Don't let failure and setbacks derail an adventure or a campaign. Rather, look for ways that failure or partial success might lead to new ways to reach a campaign goal.

You might be absolutely confident that the characters will save those townsfolk and earn their trust, letting you use the townsfolk to reveal an important quest goal. But if the town burns down despite the heroes' best intentions—or because they had better things to do—let them be mistaken for local authorities come to lend a hand in the aftermath. Or let them be unexpectedly arrested after being mistaken for the evil forces that burned the town down, and given the dangerous quest out of animosity. Humor plays a big part in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, so make use of unheroic irony whenever the players and characters provide it.

Adjusting the Adventure

Wow. Can you believe the advice your players are getting in that sidebar on the last page? And after all the time you're going to put in getting ready to run this adventure? Outrageous! Someone needs to teach these people a lesson.

If you're running the adventure for larger or smaller groups, you can adjust the encounters using the guidelines given in chapter 3, "Creating Adventures," in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Or maybe you'll adjust them anyway to keep things interesting. And never forget that you can change up any aspects of the adventure to make them a better fit for your campaign. Swap monsters around to keep the players guessing, or make use of the adventure's many suggestions for side treks and additional encounters. That'll keep these so-called heroes in line.

Life Goes On

By its most basic nature, a roleplaying game campaign focuses on the actions of the characters. However, it's important to remember that the world goes on without them. The heroes can't be everywhere at once. If they establish a base in one town but spend a lot of time away, anything could happen to that base. Hirelings might grow disenchanted in the characters' service if abused, neglected, or left to their own devices for too long. Ramp up the drama and the humor of a campaign by occasionally focusing on what the characters neglected or left behind.

Let the Franchise Shine

An Acquisitions Incorporated franchise is like a newborn baby that the characters all had a hand in conceiving, delivering, and raising. It needs constant care and feeding as it grows to its full potential, but there'll be a lot of risks, drama, and dirty diapers along the way. (Okay, that might be taking the analogy too far, but you get the idea.) Running a franchise can be difficult, but the potential rewards for the characters are tremendous. And for the players, making the franchise the focal point of the campaign provides a joint goal and a shared vessel of creative input.

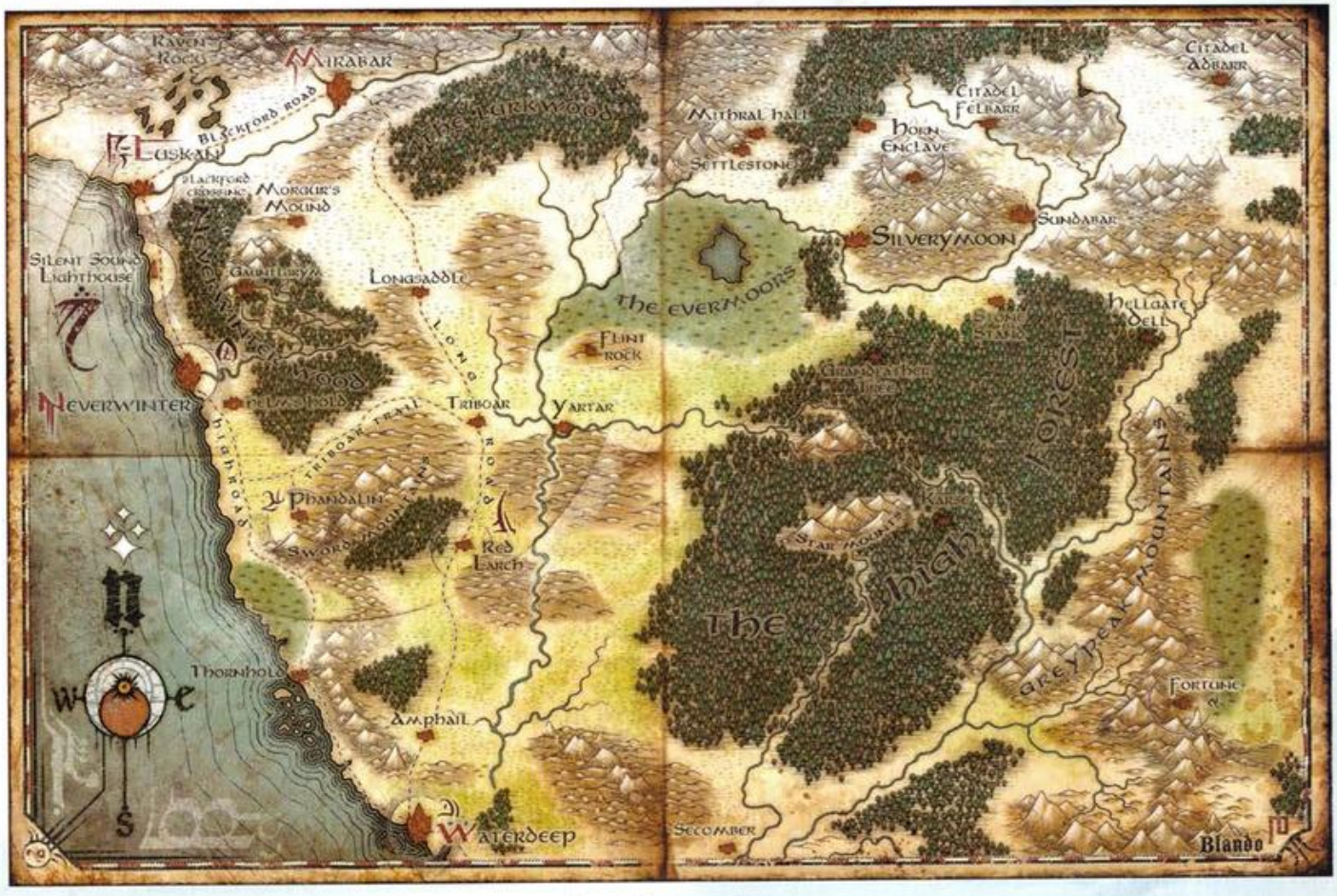
Story Overview

This adventure touches on a number of classic tropes in its setup and execution. Artifact of incalculable power accidentally stumbled upon? Check. Evil faction with plans to end the world? Got it. But even against potentially world-shattering events and plots, an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign is always centered around humble characters making choices—including one unfortunate NPC whose choices have set the adventure in motion.

A year ago, a group of adventurers led by a dwarf named Caerhan Coalsmith found a strange object buried in the remains of a ruined tower. The relic appeared to be a golden orrery housing, missing its geared clockwork components. It was obviously a magic item of some kind, but arcane lore wasn't the party's strong suit, so the orrery was set aside while Caerhan investigated its provenance and history.

The dwarf heard a few tales about devices that matched the relic's description. Though he never learned the full scope of its powers, rumors told of how those powers would increase if a magic orrery's missing components were collected and placed within it. Unfortunately, Caerhan also never learned about the curse the orrery carried—and his party paid the price.

As an artifact, the *Orrery of the Wanderer* comes with a random major detrimental property (see the "Artifacts" section in chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). The specifics of that property when the orrery housing was found are left up to you, but whatever it was (compulsion to evil for someone in the party, hostile life



Map 1.1: Campaign Area

force, imprisoned death slaad, yadda yadda), Caerhan returned from a research trip to Candlekeep to find his fellow party members all dead.

Recognizing too late that the orrery housing channeled dark power, the grieving Caerhan decided that the relic must be destroyed. However, its artifact-level magic made it seemingly impervious to harm. More research was undertaken with the help of Caerhan's goblin sidekick, Gorkoh. In the end, Caerhan concluded that the best place to ensure the orrery's end was a secret shrine to destruction beneath Waterdeep, rumored to be able to destroy even powerful magic relics. So the pair packed up and headed for the City of Splendors.

The veteran dwarf adventurer located the underground tunnels leading to the shrine easily enough. He and Gorkoh braved those dangerous passages, but were separated during an encounter with a carrion crawler. Caerhan pressed on. But when he activated the shrine, he caused a minor earthquake that opened a sinkhole in Waterdeep's Dock Ward, and which cracked walls and sidewalks across the city. In the end, the orrery housing was too strong even for the destructive power of the shrine, and Caerhan died during his heroic attempt to rid the world of the dangerous device. Now, the orrery waits for someone else to take possession of it.

As the characters will learn in time, the orrery and its components were intentionally scattered long ago. But the pieces of the orrery maintain a connection, and have been steadily making their way toward each other for years. With one piece permanently held by the orrery's creator in the Greypeak Mountains, the other components and the orrery housing have ended up scattered across the Sword Coast, falling into the hands of different adventuring groups. One of those groups is the evil faction known as the Six, whose members have become aware of the orrery's existence—and have a full understanding of its potential for destructive power. That power is described in the orrery write-up in appendix D.

As the characters are drawn into contact with the orrery, they discover that two of the artifact's components have been claimed by Acquisitions Incorporated franchises that have come under recent attack by unknown foes. The rival faction of Dran Enterprises becomes a prime suspect, with its agents found on the scene for both attacks. And all the while, the shadowy members of the Six pull together a tangled plot to gain control of the orrery to destroy Acquisitions Incorporated—and bring ruin to Faerûn.

As the adventure unfolds, the characters travel hither and yon across the Sword Coast and the North, checking in on some classic adventure locations and exploring a number of brand-new sites. Map 1.1 shows the sites and locations featured in "The Orrery of the Wanderer."

Episode 1: Right Place, Wrong Heroes

In episode 1 of the adventure, a case of mistaken identity gives the characters a rare opportunity to make a name for themselves in Acquisitions Incorporated. Their assigned task is to investigate a sinkhole fissure that

Sure, I get it. Your first time meeting Omin Dran can be intimidating. But just remember, under all that armor is a merciless psychopath infused with the power of a god.

—Jim Darkmagic

opened up in Waterdeep after a small earthquake struck the city—the side effect of Caerhan Coalsmith's failed attempt to destroy the *Orrery of the Wanderer*. If the characters can conclude the investigation successfully, Acquisitions Incorporated CEO Omin Dran presents them with a unique chance to rise within the ranks of the organization.

A Disorienting Orientation

The adventure begins with the characters seeking franchise opportunities or internships at the Waterdeep offices of Acquisitions Incorporated. All the characters should know the popular tales of that well-known organization and might have ties to Acq Inc (especially characters with one of the backgrounds from chapter 3).

For a nervously long length of time, the characters are kept waiting in a conference room at Head Office. Read or paraphrase the following to begin:

> Your inquiries into internships and franchise opportunities at Acquisitions Incorporated have gone even better than you'd hoped. Ridiculous rumors talk about how prospective interns of Acq Inc aren't always treated with respect, dignity, or care. Even more ridiculous tales of interns dying at an alarming rate are told throughout the city. Thankfully, you don't believe a word of any of that.
>
> So far, everyone at Head Office has treated you with kindness, and even a bit of deference. You were shown into this elegant conference room, given fine food and drink, and asked to wait to speak with none other than Omin Dran—founder and CEO of this august organization.

If the characters already know each other, they were ushered into the conference room as a group. If they came to Head Office separately, they were each brought in alone and asked to wait with the others, and have a chance to introduce themselves before Omin appears.

> It isn't long before the door to the conference room opens, and an intense-looking half-elf in plate armor enters. He wears a holy symbol of Tymora, the goddess of fortune, around his neck. It's Omin Dran! With no introduction, the CEO of Acquisitions Incorporated speaks.

When visiting Head Office, never approach Omin directly. Use the proper forms and filing procedures. After a brief four-month waiting time, you will be granted a very generous sixty-second meeting. It'll be the best minute of your life.

—Walnut Dankgrass

Life in Waterdeep

Before diving headlong into the events of "The Orrery of the Wanderer" campaign, you might wish to spend some time having the characters experience and explore the city of Waterdeep. The adventure *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* and the "Volo's Waterdeep Enchiridion" section of that book (available at the DMs Guild as a separate download—**www.dmsguild.com**) provide a ton of information about the City of Splendors.

Additionally, you can make use of the following rumors that characters might hear on the streets or in the taverns of that great metropolis. Some of these rumors tie to the adventure, while the truth of others depends on your wishes for the campaign. Either way, feel free to use these rumors as inspiration for new encounters or side treks.

- Omin Dran is one of the fabled Masked Lords of Waterdeep. His presence on the council is the impetus for beneficial changes sweeping across the city.
- Omin Dran is definitely not one of the Masked Lords of Waterdeep. The addition to the council of such a power-hungry and ruthless individual would spell the end of the rule of law in the City of Splendors.
- The earthquake that hit the city two days ago wasn't natural. Strong magic unleashed underground caused it—maybe even magic from Undermountain.
- Acquisitions Incorporated is making a play for control in the city, and the other power groups of Waterdeep are not going to let that happen without a fight. The recent hostilities between groups such as the Xanathar Guild and the Zhentarim have been made even worse by the increasing sway of the company.
- A noble merchant in the South Ward survived an assassination attempt last night. A female half-elf was seen fleeing the scene, bearing a deep cut on her shoulder from a bodyguard's blade. A 50 gp bounty has been offered for bringing her in alive for questioning.
- A killer is stalking the streets of the North Ward, murdering people in broad daylight. The victims' feet are chopped off, as if by a powerful blow with a sharp blade. Then they're decapitated. The heads are left behind, but the feet are taken!
- The famous Waterdavian actor Tystanya Creed has not been seen since leaving the theatre after her last performance several days ago. Her adoring fans fear she is dead.
- Towering forms in black cloaks have been seen around the City of the Dead at night. A number of witnesses swear that those cloaks and their deep hoods concealed skeletal forms.
- A green dragon was spotted flying over the Sea of Swords just west of the city. The Blackstaff and her team are on high alert in case it ventures closer or harasses ships in the area.
- One of the great walking statues of Waterdeep has been reported to be crying over the last three days. No one is sure about the cause of this watery discharge from the eyes, but some say it means the destruction of the City of Splendors is imminent! Others are certain it's a sign of great fortune on the horizon. Still others say it's just the humidity.
- Members of the Guild of Chandlers and Lamplighters are going on strike, leaving the streets of Waterdeep dark and dangerous around the next new moon. The thieves and assassins of the city are already getting prepared for a night of carnage.

"Thank you for answering my call so quickly. When the earthquake struck the city two days ago, damage was limited, but a sinkhole opened up a fissure beneath an abandoned warehouse in Dock Ward. Two City Watch guards entered the fissure to investigate, but never came out. They're now feared dead, and the City Watch has asked me to take over the investigation. But my schedule is complicated at the moment, so I'm delegating that job to you. As an experienced adventuring group, I have no doubt that you can handle the task."

Before you have any chance to respond, Omin drops a hefty bag of coins onto the table. "The pay is 500 gold dragons for the group, with a 20 percent commission going to Acquisitions Incorporated as the broker. Go to the warehouse next to Jolly's Lamp Emporium down by the docks. Tell the City Watch guards stationed there that I sent you. Explore the fissure, learn the fate of the guards who went missing, and then come back to me with the signed City Watch papers confirming your completed work."

Then without another word, Omin Dran turns and leaves the room.

Through a crazy and never-to-be-explained misunderstanding, Omin believes that the characters are a group of experienced adventurers that he put out a call for just the day before. If the characters attempt to correct this misunderstanding, he ignores them. The CEO of Acquisitions Incorporated has important business to deal with, and can't be bothered with such trifles.

Jim Darkmagic Sets Things Straight

With absolutely no idea what they're meant to do or how they got into this position, the characters might try to seek out assistance before they leave Head Office. Or they might just wander around lost for a bit. Either way, Jim Darkmagic approaches the group with some words of ... well, let's call it wisdom. When it's time for Jim to make his appearance, read or paraphrase the following:

A puff of smoke erupts out of nowhere. As the haze disperses, a handsome figure steps forward. It's Jim Darkmagic of the New Hampshire Darkmagics! Except he's wearing a set of glasses that he apparently thinks is an effective disguise as he bows before you.

"I'm no one you know," he says. "But I couldn't help but notice that you seem a little flustered. I believe Omin just offered you work. And I also have a feeling you might not be the adventurers he thinks you are."

Jim Darkmagic

Jim looks around to make sure no one else is listening in, then leans forward to deliver a conspiratorial whisper. "You want my advice? Do the job. If you can pull it off, Omin will be so impressed that you'll have a leg up on everybody else trying to gain footing with the company. You've heard the phrase "opportunity knocks?" Well, opportunity is heading right at your door with a battering ram. Stand in that doorway, friends. Let opportunity smash its way in."

Jim's reasons for interceding with the characters are left to your determination. He might have intercepted the experienced adventurers Omin called for, then sent them off on a secret personal mission on his own behalf. Or he might have accidentally set them on fire when they arrived at Acquisitions Incorporated Head Office. Whatever the case, he needs the players' group to attempt Omin's mission, and he's keen to get them on their way.

If the characters have any questions about the assignment, Jim can be the vessel through which you answer. Those who appear enthusiastic, appreciative, and deferential to Jim might even be gifted a *spell scroll* of *Jim's magic missile*. However, before an arcane caster can use the *spell scroll* or copy it into a spellbook, they need to understand the new royalty component for spells. See "New Spells" in chapter 3 for more information.

Jim Darkmagic is ... uh ... How do I put this? He's, uh ... hmm. Let me get back to you.

—Omin Dran

If the characters attempt to sort the case of mistaken identity out, Jim tells them Omin is unavailable, and concedes that they don't have to take the job. He points out that the characters are welcome to leave Acq Inc and never come back. But Omin might want to have words with them later about the dastardly way they misrepresented themselves.

After finishing up at Acquisitions Incorporated Head Office, the adventurers can set off to perform their appointed mission.

Dock Ward

Omin's assignment takes the characters to Dock Ward in Waterdeep, a maze of seedy tenements, rough streets, and even rougher alleyways. If the characters have spent time in the city, they might have heard that much of this ward is set up as safe houses, meeting places, and fronts for a variety of criminal organizations, including the Xanathar Guild and the Zhentarim. None of these groups are particularly happy right now, since the sinkhole caused by the earthquake opened up smack dab in the middle of their territory. The sinkhole also brought the Waterdeep City Watch to the ward, a move welcomed by no one—least of all the members of the Watch, who must now stand guard over the site until it can be investigated and closed.

A character whose background entails knowledge of the ward knows the general layout of its streets and alleys, but finding Jolly's Lamp Emporium and the abandoned warehouse requires asking for directions at some point. Use the following encounters as a general setup, but you can add additional encounters as the characters make their way through the ward as you see fit.

Maps and Poshuns

As the adventurers make their way through the streets of Dock Ward, they come upon an unlikely commercial venture.

> A ramshackle stall set up along the street bears a sign that reads: "Maps and Poshuns." Working the stall is a filthy but cheerful gnome urchin. Several pieces of parchment are on display in the stall, with six small ceramic pots placed next to them.

The rapscallion is Jerronimous "Jerr" Burntberry (CN male gnome **commoner**) who is quite a bit older than he looks. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check tips the characters off that the adult gnome is disguised to look like a youngster. Jerr hopes to join the Zhentarim one day, but he needs a little more experience. In the meantime, he makes a living by scribbling on pieces of parchment he scrounges from garbage heaps, selling them as maps to unwitting fools searching for places in Dock Ward. He also collects fetid rainwater in small, red clay pots, which leach out just enough color that he can pass the water off as *potions of healing*.

The potions have a faintly fruity aroma. A *detect magic* spell shows that they are indeed magical, though that magic is of the transmutation school rather than conjuration. Each day, a kindly druid who thinks Jerr is an honest soul gives the gnome a goodberry for his health. Rather than eat the berry, Jerr crushes it up and adds a drop of juice to each pot. Jerr sells maps for 1 gp and the potions for 10 gp. He also tries to sell other useless or counterfeit objects at your discretion.

If the adventurers ask Jerr to be a guide, he happily takes the job for 1 gp. He then leads the characters straight into an ambush by a gang working for the Zhentarim (see the "Skeleton Crew" encounter below). A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check is needed to see through the skilled lies of the gnome.

If you wish, Jerr can become a recurring character in the campaign. He might keep tabs on the characters as they grow famous, showing up in cities where they travel, trying to sell more useless goods, or eventually spying on them for the Zhentarim. Or if paid and treated well, he could become a valuable source of information for the characters when they need someone to infiltrate tough areas.

Skeleton Crew

As the characters make their way farther into Dock Ward, they encounter street thugs growing increasing resentful of the presence of the City Watch. These thugs need to earn some quick coin, then lay low until the Watch leaves the ward. And mugging the next group of distracted strangers to wander down the wrong street seems like just the ticket.

The four **bandit** members of the crew are run-of-the-mill criminals looking to get ahead in the world through treachery. Their leader, Jelayne, was similar ... until she was killed a year before. Jelayne wasn't one to let death keep her down, however, and she continues to lead the group as an unusual **skeleton** with these changes:

- She has Intelligence and Charisma scores of 14 (+2).
- She can speak Common.

Jelayne isn't aware that she's undead. Even though the last of her flesh is constantly sloughing off her, she dismisses that effect as "allergies." The rest of the crew don't know what to do, since Jelayne has kept her intellect, knowledge, and personality. They have always followed her and done fine for themselves, so why let death interfere with a good thing?

When the encounter begins, read:

> A figure stands in the alleyway, its luminous eyes glowing beneath a dark hood. As the hood is pulled away to reveal a skeletal face, the figure unexpectedly speaks. "Your money or your life!"

The other members of the crew hide in adjacent alleyways or on the rooftop of a nearby building. They enter the fray if the characters don't surrender their valuables immediately.

If the adventurers defeat the crew and study Jelayne, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check confirms that she was raised as undead by a unique ritual that allowed her to keep her intellect and ability to speak. This has no bearing on the encounter,

but sets up the existence of such rituals as foreshadowing for later events. See the "A Horse is a Corpse, of Course" section and "The Magic of Convenience" sidebar in episode 2 for more information.

Treasure. In her belt pouch, Jelayne carries a *potion of healing*, 10 gp, and the bones of four of her toes that have fallen off. She used to be really attached to them.

The Mystic

Continuing on through Dock Ward, the characters catch unexpected sight of a kidnapping.

> An old male human hobbles up the street, his long staff bearing most of his weight. His wrinkled face tells a tale of many hard years lived in poverty. As he passes an alleyway entrance, he looks up at you and grins, revealing his last few remaining teeth. But even as he opens his mouth as if to speak, a pair of meaty gray arms emerge from the alley entrance and yank him into the darkness.

The characters are 20 feet from the alley entrance when the old man—a seer named Kal Ruudheart (NG male human **commoner**)—is grabbed. The perpetrators are Big Gustava (NE female **duergar**) and her friend who goes by the name Devil Dog (CE female tiefling **acolyte**). The two are street thieves trying to work their way up to larger scores. Devil Dog uses the acolyte stat block with these racial traits:

- She knows the *thaumaturgy* cantrip, and Charisma is her spellcasting ability for this spell.
- She has resistance to fire damage.
- She has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet.
- She speaks Common and Infernal.

Big Gustava is the muscle of the duo. Devil Dog stays out of harm's way, fleeing quickly if it looks like the situation might turn dire. She saves her spells to aid her escape rather than using them offensively.

The thugs grabbed Kal because they heard the old fool can predict the future. They don't want to hurt him, but simply hope to persuade him to help them make as much coin as possible with little risk.

Questioning Kal. If the characters save Kal, he looks at them with the same grin. He doesn't express gratitude, though, because his mind wanders through a different level of existence, as is the case for many mystics, celebrities, and financial planners. He laughs when asked a question. He answers questions that no one asked. He nods but says no, or vice versa, even when he has no reason to do so. However, when the second sight grips him, all that changes.

> Kal's eyes come into focus and he becomes as sober as a priest of Ilmater at sunup. "Their plans are afoot," he whispers. "Their staff are ready. Their balance sheets are totaled, and that total is grim. They mean to bring the end of all things! You must seek the magic! Only you can stop them! Only you! You ... are who again, sorry?"

After this suitably dramatic and stylishly vague telegraphing of the adventure's archplot, Kal reverts to his normal abnormal state of mind for good.

Treasure. Gustava wears a set of stylish silver earrings worth 40 gp.

Devil Dog carries nothing of value, but in exchange for her life, she promises to take her captors back to her apartment, where she says she keeps her money. Instead of doing so, however, she leads the characters on a merry walk through the worst parts of Dock Ward, where she knows six **bandits** who will attack them and allow her to flee.

Warehouse Environs

Eventually, the characters spot the sign for Jolly's Lamp Emporium. Read the following as they move toward their goal:

> Jolly's Lamp Emporium is an unassuming, ramshackle shop in the midst of other unassuming, ramshackle shops—including the collapsed warehouse next door. People in nearby shops and apartments peer warily through their shutters as you approach. Next to the warehouse, three members of the Waterdeep City Watch stand guard. No one else is on the street, except a seemingly inebriated halfling who stumbles toward you.

Gray Hands Spy

The stumbling figure is Otis Adalgrim (NG male halfling **spy**). Otis works for the Gray Hands—members of the City Watch or the City Guard invited to join a special security force working directly for Vajra Safahr, the Blackstaff of Waterdeep. The Blackstaff fears that some evil faction might have been involved in the earthquake, and she has tasked Otis with watching the area in disguise to see who comes to investigate.

Otis pretends to ignore the group, although he makes note of their presence as he staggers by. Any character who succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check gets the feeling that the halfling is only acting the part of a drunken passerby. If confronted, Otis does his best to maintain the facade. He moves away from the adventurers as quickly as possible, but he circles back to watch them as they interact with the City Watch and enter the sinkhole fissure.

Otis can be used as a wild card later in this episode of the adventure. For example, if the characters are faring poorly during the encounters under the warehouse, the halfling could follow and intervene on their behalf, healing unconscious party members or dragging them away from danger. Later in the campaign, Otis might act as a recurring NPC who crosses paths with the characters while they're in Waterdeep, making sure they have information they need and don't run afoul of the law.

The City Watch

The three members of the City Watch standing guard at the collapsed warehouse make sure no unauthorized

people enter the area. At the same time, they ensure that nothing terrible escapes from the fissure into the city.

The leader of the trio is Captain Mergen Truff (NG female elf **veteran**), a laconic figure who would rather be doing "real work" than standing here warning off vagrants too foolish to avoid falling into a massive hole in the ground. Her companions are Orvis Torval (N male firbolg **guard**) and Rosko Bosh (N male halfling **guard**). Orvis and Rosko are new constables, not the sharpest swords in the armory, and as lazy as wizards who've used all their spell slots. Local thieves pay them to look the other way when ordered to do so, which becomes important later in the episode.

When the characters approach, Captain Truff steps forward, tells them that the area is off-limits, and orders them to move along. When the characters get across the purpose of their presence (most easily by stating that Omin Dran sent them), Truff is clearly relieved, though still not entirely friendly.

> The captain sighs. "Took you long enough," she says. "So let's get this done so we can get on with our lives."
>
> She pulls a scroll from a leather pack and squints at its barely legible writing. "So which one of you is Ozgood the Ugly? I need you to sign before you go in. Nothing but paperwork and signatures since the newest Masked Lords got seated on the council, but what can you do?"

Mergen Truff, Orvis Torval, and Rosko Bosh

What Was Your Name Again? Captain Truff's scroll contains the names of the members of the adventuring party that Omin Dran thought he hired to do this job. The number of names conveniently matches the number of characters, and can include any of the following:

- Ozgood the Ugly
- Carlot "Squeaky" Wickel
- "Great Maul" McTickleton
- Lord Pompy Fuggelstruck
- Squinty Pip
- Mad Haddey Flagon
- Fippance Gibberjaw

To gain access to the warehouse and the sinkhole fissure, the characters must pretend to be the named adventurers. Assume that the City Watch members know the names and reputations of some of the adventurers on the list, but have never met them in person. If a character pretends to be Lord Pompy Fuggelstruck and speaks to the guards, Captain Truff might think it odd that they aren't speaking with Fuggelstruck's well-known lisp, or predilection for using rhyming couplets, or what have you. You can let roleplaying determine the outcome, or call for DC 10 Charisma (Deception) checks for the characters to pass off any outright lies.

Captain Truff is eager to get someone—anyone—to investigate the fissure as soon as possible, allowing her to go back to her normal duties. Even if she becomes suspicious that the characters aren't the adventurers named on the scroll, as long as someone signs as Ozgood, she's content to allow them to investigate.

Useful Information. Once the characters' identities are "confirmed," they might have some questions for the guards. Use the following points to steer the conversation—and make sure to work in the first three points as a warning from the guards, even if the players fail to seek more information:

- The fissure opened beneath the warehouse during the earthquake two days ago. The partially collapsed building has been deemed structurally sound, so it shouldn't fall into the fissure unless someone inside does something foolish, such as knock down a support beam or bang against the remaining walls.
- The fissure has exposed access to a number of mysterious tunnels beneath the warehouse. It's not known how long the tunnels have been there, who created them, or what might be lurking within.
- The contract the characters sign is fulfilled only if they investigate and clear every tunnel the fissure exposed. After they finish, a city surveyor will be assigned to map the area, and an engineer needs to assess the integrity of the tunnels to ensure that no further collapses are imminent. If either professional is injured or killed because of negligence on the part of the adventurers, the party and Acquisitions Incorporated can be held liable.
- Two members of the City Watch—Sergeant Ava Teeshe and Constable Yander Boot—descended into the fissure a day earlier to make sure it held nothing dangerous. From the bottom of the sinkhole, they followed an underground passage north. They haven't been seen or heard from since.

- Sergeant Teeshe is a tall, strapping female human who has seen her share of scuffles and doesn't back down from a fight. If something took her out, it must be powerful.
- By contrast, Constable Boot is a runty male human, and infamous for his cowardice. However, anything that caught him while he tried to flee must be fast.
- The three guards have been ordered to remain on site until the exploration of the fissure is complete. Captain Truff is clear in articulating her hopes that the adventurers can wrap up the investigation quickly. Every second she spends in this unruly section of Dock Ward grates on her nerves.

Jolly's Lamp Emporium

If the characters enter this shop at any point during their time around the warehouse, they find the short, rotund proprietor standing behind a rough-hewn counter. Jolly (NE male half-orc **thug**) maintains this business as a front for the Xanathar Guild. The number of lamps in the so-called Lamp Emporium totals exactly six. From the looks of those wares, it's not clear that any of the lamps actually work.

Stolen coins, valuables, and other black-market goods are stored in a secret room in the back until they are ready to be sold. Guild members use the shop's other back rooms to hide from the authorities or plan jobs. At the moment, the only person in the building other than Jolly is a Xanathar Guild agent who goes by the moniker Feather (NE female half-elf **assassin**).

Feather is lying low after a failed assassination attempt in the South Ward the previous night (see the "Life in Waterdeep" sidebar earlier in this episode), and pretends to be Jolly's assistant. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine or Perception) check allows a character to notice that Feather moves stiffly, as if her shoulder is badly injured.

Jolly does his best to get the adventurers out of his shop as quickly as possible. If asked about the earthquake or the fissure beneath the warehouse next door, he says only that he heard the ground shake and felt the warehouse cave in. If the adventurers threaten force and succeed on a DC 10 Charisma (Intimidation) check, they can convince Jolly to give up the one useful piece of information he knows. The tunnels beneath the warehouse were used by thieves at one time, but they were abandoned because of unknown dangers that came up from the darkness below. Jolly has no idea what those dangers might be.

The Fissure

When the fissure opened up at the bottom of the sinkhole, it exposed a number of tunnels used for a variety of purposes and by a multitude of people over the years. The first of the tunnels beneath the warehouse were dug as smugglers' byways. Later, worshipers of That-Which-Endures (see the sidebar in the "New Race: Verdan" section in chapter 3) excavated chambers beneath the ground to hold clandestine meetings and worship at a secret shrine of destruction. Various thieves' guilds employed the tunnels to move from place to place secretly. Renegade wizards did terrible experiments there. At one point, part of the Waterdeep sewer system crossed into the tunnel network. Not long after, the subterranean spaces were abandoned.

As a result of the earthquake, many of the tunnel system's side passages have been blocked by rubble. The limited zone that is still traversable leads the characters from the fissure to the lost shrine of destruction—and through a number of dangerous areas in between.

When the adventurers enter the warehouse, read:

> In the areas where the walls and ceiling didn't collapse, this warehouse contains no crates, no boxes, no barrels, and no wares of any other kind. Directly in front of the missing door, the walls, ceiling, and floor have fallen away to reveal a deep sinkhole fissure. Inside the ruin, a hempen rope anchored firmly in the rubble dangles down into the darkness. The tear in the earth descends at an angle, making it impossible to see how far down it goes or what waits at the bottom.

Descending into the fissure is easily done by characters using the rope, but requires a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check by anyone climbing down the rough stone walls. On a failed check, a character tumbles down the sloping fissure and takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

Maps 1.2 and 1.3 show the layout of the caverns and chambers beneath the fissure.

Map 1.2: Areas 1, 2, 3, and 5

1. Rats

When the first character reaches the bottom of the sinkhole, read:

> The sinkhole fissure ends at a level floor of worked stone. Dust, debris, rocks, and pieces of wood that once made up the walls and ceiling of the warehouse above are spread across the floor. An underground passage is blocked to the south, but it continues into darkness to the north. Two pairs of human-sized boot prints, easily spotted in the dust, head northward. Smaller fissures, holes, and cracks riddle the passage, though even a halfling would find the largest of them a tight fit.

The floor of the corridor is difficult terrain for 20 feet around the point where the characters descend.

Creatures. After the first character has been at the bottom of the fissure for 2 rounds, a group of six **giant rats** notices the potential feast. Any character at the bottom of the fissure who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check can hear the approaching rats, and isn't surprised when three rats emerge from cracks in the walls and attack. Three more rats arrive and attack 1 round later. All the rats are dyed a bright green from trap C in area 3.

Treasure. When the final rat dies, it coughs up a humanoid finger bearing a platinum ring worth 20 gp. Etched inside the ring is the name "Burton Boot." The ring belonged to the father of Yander Boot, the deceased constable of the Watch, and was bitten off by the rat after Boot was killed (see area 5).

2. Trials

The earthquake sealed many of the passages that once made up this underground maze. As the characters explore, they pass through worked tunnels, natural caverns, and functional sewers at different points. Most side passages are blocked by rubble, making the path of the two Waterdeep City Watch guards easy to follow.

The next area of interest on the adventurers' journey is a chamber that the followers of That-Which-Endures once used as a testing ground for new recruits.

> This rectangular chamber shows no earthquake damage, possibly because of the buttresses and columns supporting the walls and ceiling. Four pools of liquid are set into the floor—one blue, another green, a third clear, and the last cloudy. Carvings on the walls seemingly depict the pools, and show robed figures submerging themselves within. At the far end of the chamber stands a double door with a large, ornately carved lock.

The pools represent the trials the characters must undertake to pass the test of That-Which-Endures. Each pool is 10 feet deep and has sheer sides. To trigger the

effects of a pool, a creature must completely submerge itself in its liquid. The pools and the double door radiate transmutation to a *detect magic* spell or similar effect.

Double Doors. The lock on the double doors opens with a key granted by passing the trials of the pools (see below). If the characters have that key, they can open the doors without consequences.

Opening the lock without the key requires a successful DC 17 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. Any unsuccessful attempt to pick the lock triggers a trap (see below). The door cannot be broken down or otherwise smashed, and attempting to do so triggers the trap.

A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check allows a character to spot faint runes etched among the ornate carvings on the lock. A subsequent DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check to study the runes reveals that they can emit a wave of transmutation magic throughout the room.

Blue Pool. A character fully submerged in the blue pool must make a DC 10 Charisma saving throw as images of horror overwhelm their mind. On a failure, the character has visions of terrible calamities such as rotting flesh, crumbling edifices, and political speeches. This trauma imposes disadvantage on initiative rolls. On a successful save, these visions put the character on edge, granting advantage on initiative rolls. Either effect lasts until the end of the character's next long rest.

Green Pool. A character fully submerged in this pool must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw as poison courses into their body. On a failure, the character takes 5 (1d10) poison damage and gains vulnerability to poison damage. On a successful save, the character takes no damage and gains resistance to poison damage. Either effect lasts until the end of the character's next long rest.

Clear Pool. A character fully submerged in this pool must make a DC 10 Intelligence saving throw as the infinite possibilities of the multiverse seep into their brain. On a failure, overwhelming theoretical possibilities impose one level of exhaustion on the character. On a successful save, the character gains a clarity of mind that grants advantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma checks and saving throws. Either effect lasts until the end of the character's next long rest.

Cloudy Pool. A character fully submerged in this pool must make a DC 10 Wisdom check to endure the intense itching caused by the acid that fills it. On a failure, the character takes 5 (1d10) acid damage and gains vulnerability to acid damage. On a successful save, the character takes no damage and gains resistance to acid damage. Either effect lasts until the end of the character's next long rest.

Entropy's Parting Gift. If the same character is submerged in all four pools, that character receives the blessing of That-Which-Endures. This blessing comes in handy later in area 7.

Key. To make the key appear, one or more characters must enter all four pools, whether the outcome is good or bad. When a character is submerged in the last pool, a silver key studded with polished red garnets appears in midair in the center of the room.

Door Trap. Any creature in the room when the trap on the double doors triggers must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature is transformed into a **poisonous snake** for 1d4 rounds, as if affected by the *polymorph* spell. The snakes are compelled to attack any other creatures in the room.

Treasure. In addition to opening the door, the key is worth 25 gp.

RESTING

No pressing matters force the characters to complete their investigation quickly. This episode is for 1st-level adventurers, and the characters are at their most vulnerable at this level. As such, it's important to allow them to take rests. However, if the players become overly cautious and attempt to take a long rest after every encounter, have wandering monsters interrupt their attempts to sleep. Any low-challenge cavern-dwelling beasts are perfect for prodding the adventurers along.

3. TRAPS

This part of the underground complex contains a number of traps installed by the previous occupants. The traps were set up to scare people away rather than kill them. Mostly.

When the characters enter this area, read:

> As the passage runs east, it widens to thirty feet for the next ninety feet. At the far end of the area, the chamber narrows to ten feet again, with an ornate double door sealing it off.

Four different traps protect this room, with each of their areas of effect marked on the map. The magic of traps A and C can be dispelled, or can be suppressed for 1 minute with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

Trap A. With a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notices that the floor in this area shows signs of charring that obscures faint runes. A weak fire trap triggers if any creature enters the area, which radiates evocation to a *detect magic* spell or similar effect. Each creature in the area when the trap triggers takes 2 (1d4) fire damage.

Trap B. This pit trap triggers when weight is put on it. Locating the trap requires a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check, but the check is made with disadvantage unless the creature making it is within 5 feet of the trap. When the pit opens, the triggering creature drops into a 10-foot-deep pit and takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage. The lid remains open, and the pit begins filling with water flowing up from grates in the floor—along with small, glowing blue fish. These are harmless glowing cave fish, but it takes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to recognize that. The fish immediately start to bite any exposed skin of a creature in the water, but the result is only healthful exfoliation.

With a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check, a character can climb the rough walls of the pit, or can stay floating while the pit fills and eventually clamber out.

Trap C. Nearly invisible runes cover the floor in this area. The runes radiate conjuration to a *detect magic* spell or similar effect, or can be detected with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. When a creature steps into the area, the runes conjure up a swirling cloud of green dye that covers each creature in the area that fails a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw.

The magical dye is nontoxic, cruelty free, pet safe, and hypoallergenic. It vanishes if an affected creature is targeted by *dispel magic*. Otherwise, it takes 1d4 months to fade, even with constant scrubbing. Additionally, any savvy thief operating in the civilized settlements of the Sword Coast recognizes that a character covered in this dye fell victim to a trap. Those thieves might target such characters as easy marks in future adventures.

Trap D. The area of trap D appears as normal stone, and its trigger is contained in the double door. It takes a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check to recognize subtle details in the stonework revealing the trap's area.

When any creature touches the double doors, including to pick the lock, each creature standing in area D must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or be teleported to the mummy chamber (see below).

Double Doors. The ornate double doors here are locked, and are the trigger for trap D. They radiate conjuration to a *detect magic* spell or similar effect. Opening the doors requires a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. The doors can also be smashed open with a successful DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check, or broken down with attacks (AC 10, 30 hit points, immunity to poison and psychic damage).

Mummy Chamber. When the characters can see the chamber beyond the double doors, read:

> Slabs set along the walls of this stone chamber hold human-sized bodies wrapped from head to toe in strips of off-white cloth. Even as the doors open, these wrapped bodies begin to rise.

The cloth-wrapped bodies that first rise off the slabs and lurch toward the characters are four **zombies**. But any creatures teleported by the double doors are also in this chamber, having been magically wrapped in cloth and temporarily paralyzed. When the doors are opened, each paralyzed creature must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw. On a successful save, the creature can act freely. It takes an action for a creature to tear away the cloth wrappings on itself or another creature.

On a failed save, the creature is no longer paralyzed but is compelled to rise along with the zombies and move toward the doors. Characters caught by this compulsion are indistinguishable from the zombies, though they aren't forced to attack. An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the creature shambles around for 1 minute.

Treasure. Each of the zombies wears a silver necklace worth 10 gp. Resting on one of the slabs is a *potion of healing* and a *spell scroll* of *bless*.

4. Tunnels

An extensive tunnel system beyond the trap room does not appear on the map. This area is a complex maze of passages crisscrossing each other, collapsed tunnels forcing the characters to take side passages, weak areas exposed by the earthquake and threatening to collapse, and so on. To successfully navigate this area, the characters must tread carefully, look for signs of previous passage and structural weakness, dodge falling rocks, and use their wits.

Picking Up the Trail. The characters' first task is to stay on the trail left by Sergeant Teeshe and Constable Boot. Doing so requires one character to succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check. On a successful check, the characters remain safely on the trail. On a failed check, they veer off the trail at one point into an unsafe passage weakened by the earthquake. Each character must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage from falling rocks.

Clearing a Path. The trail leads to an area where a cave-in occurred sometime after Teeshe and Boot passed through. To clear the cave-in, the characters work together to move the debris and secure the passage. This task involves a group ability check in which the characters can use different ability checks and skills to represent different tasks. Moving debris requires a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. Shoring up the passage requires a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check. The passage is cleared regardless of the result of the group check, but if more than half the characters fail the group check, each character suffers one level of exhaustion in the process.

Blood Weeds. A circular passage is overgrown with vines emerging from the walls, floor, and ceiling. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check recognizes the vines as blood weeds—a carnivorous plant that feeds on creatures by draining blood with its thorns.

To pass through the area, each character must succeed on a DC 10 Strength (Athletics), Dexterity (Acrobatics), or Wisdom (Survival) check to avoid the vines. Too many vines choke the passage for the characters to attack them effectively with weapons. However, damaging the vines with fire or cold damage from a spell of 1st level or higher gives creatures moving up the tunnel advantage on their ability checks. Each creature that fails the check takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage from the blood-draining thorns.

Obligatory Acid Pit. The final passageway of the maze contains a pit trap filled with weak acid and floating bones. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check notices the hinged floor. With a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, a character can disable the trap by using shims to jam the top closed. If the check fails, the character thinks the trap was deactivated even though it wasn't.

If the trap is triggered, the first character stepping onto it falls into the acid-filled pit. Any creature that enters the pit for the first time on its turn or starts its turn there takes 2 (1d4) acid damage. Climbing out of the rough-sided pit is a trivial task.

5. Death

The next chamber contains the body of Constable Yander Boot. Caught in a web when fleeing from a giant spider, Boot succumbed to the spider's poison. His corpse now hangs suspended from the ceiling, wrapped in webs.

When the characters enter the chamber, read:

> The passage expands into a natural cavern whose ceiling is obscured by thick, dusty webs. Five web cocoons hang down from the larger mass, their bottoms dangling ten feet above the cavern floor. Two cocoons—one larger and one smaller—have a suspiciously humanoid shape.

Creature. The **giant spider** hides in a dust-filled depression in the floor. A successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check spots the arachnid before it springs from its hiding place to attack. Any characters who are focused on the webs above them have disadvantage on the check. Those who fail the check are surprised.

The giant spider initially favors its web attack, hoping to restrain a couple of characters before it starts biting. If reduced to 10 hit points or fewer, the spider retreats into a nearby narrow fissure. However, it attacks again when the characters come back through this area.

Treasure. If the characters cut down the web cocoons, they find the corpses of three giant rats, Constable Boot, and a kobold explorer. The kobold has a vial of acid, a flask of alchemist's fire, and a vial of antitoxin. The deceased Boot has a flask of holy water and a *potion of healing*.

6. Goblin

When Caerhan Coalsmith ventured into these caverns, his goblin sidekick Gorkoh (N male **goblin**) came with him. Caerhan and the other members of his adventuring party had spared Gorkoh's life a few months back when they cleared out a temple to Maglubiyet, the chief of the goblin gods. Caerhan saw potential for the goblin to become a productive member of society, so he became a friend and mentor to Gorkoh, and encouraged him to learn about magic. Caerhan has also encouraged Gorkoh to expand his Common vocabulary, with inconsistent results.

Since becoming separated from Caerhan during a carrion crawler attack, Gorkoh has hidden here waiting for his mentor to return. He is starting to fear (rightfully) that Caerhan is dead, however, and if the characters treat him kindly, he might be convinced to join them. Gorkoh carries standard goblin weapons, plus three *potions of healing* and a *spell scroll* of *fog cloud* that Caerhan gave him for safekeeping and study.

When the characters enter this chamber, read:

> The passage widens into a natural cavern dotted with stalactites and stalagmites. It continues on to the northeast, but the uneven walls make it hard to see into that section—even as heap of bones and gear is plainly visible.

Gorkoh hides behind one of the smaller stalagmites in the southeast section of the cavern. Any character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check spots him hiding there. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check can tell that the goblin is watching the group with trepidation. If the characters let Gorkoh know they see him, he quickly steps forth.

> The goblin emerges from behind a stalagmite and brandishes a gnarled piece of bleached wood. "I am a powerful wizard. My wand annihilates all those who make me uptight. Go away. Leave Gorkoh alone, and there's no annihilate. Gorkoh is merciful." He thrusts his wand several times in your direction.

Gorkoh continues to bluff, pretending his gnarled stick of polished driftwood is a magic wand. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check can tell that Gorkoh is bluffing. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, the character can intuit that Gorkoh is terrified. If anyone makes even the slightest effort to reassure Gorkoh that they have no plans to hurt him, the goblin relaxes.

If the characters engage Gorkoh in conversation, he tells of how he and Caerhan came to these caverns in search of a lost shrine, and how Caerhan's goal was to destroy some old magic relic. Regarding the relic, Gorkoh knows only that it's "some broken clock thing," and that it was responsible for killing the other members of Caerhan's party. He tells of how the two became separated during a carrion crawler attack in the cavern just beyond this one. Caerhan must have escaped deeper into the tunnels, but Gorkoh wasn't willing to risk facing the monster to follow.

If on friendly terms with the characters (or if he needs to offer up information to save his skin), Gorkoh can offer advice on the best way to deal with the carrion crawler, pointing out a fragile and sharp stalactite cluster at a narrow point leading into the next cavern. If the characters lure the creature under the cluster, they might be able to think of some way to drop the sharp rocks on the crawler.

If the characters try to hurt or intimidate Gorkoh, he attempts to send them into the carrion crawler's domain unprepared, hoping that the monster takes care of them.

Creature. The **carrion crawler** waits in the next area, resting after taking a beating from Caerhan. The creature has only 20 hit points remaining, but it's hungry and angry. It attacks if any character enters the next cavern, and pursues characters who flee in any direction.

Weak Ceiling. The sharp stalactites in the passage between the two chambers were weakened by the earthquake. A character who succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) or Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check can spot the danger zone if Gorkoh didn't tell the group about it. As an action, a character can strike the ceiling with a weapon or an appropriate tool, or with a spell that deals force or thunder damage. Doing so brings down the ceiling in a 10-foot-by-10-foot area. Any creature caught in the shower of razor-sharp stones must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) slashing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Treasure. The bones and gear to the northeast are the remains of a group of adventurers who fell victim to the carrion crawler months ago. A backpack and a belt pouch hold 47 gp and a large polished red garnet worth 50 gp. Sticking out of the pile of bones is a *+1 longsword*. The hilt of the sword is fashioned like a skeletal hand, and a skull-and-bones motif is prominent in the design of the weapon.

Gorkoh's Future. Provided the characters treat Gorkoh well, he's willing to serve the group as a hireling. In return for food and lodging, he becomes a reliable and enterprising employee.

On the other hand, if the characters mistreat him or regularly put him in danger, Gorkoh abandons them. If that happens, another goblin named Splugoth the Returned approaches Gorkoh with alternative employment. Gorkoh can show up later in the adventure as a servant of the Six, having gained new powers and seeking vengeance on those who mistreated him. See "Factions and Rivals" in chapter 3 for more information on the Six, and appendix B for more information on Splugoth.

7. Stomp

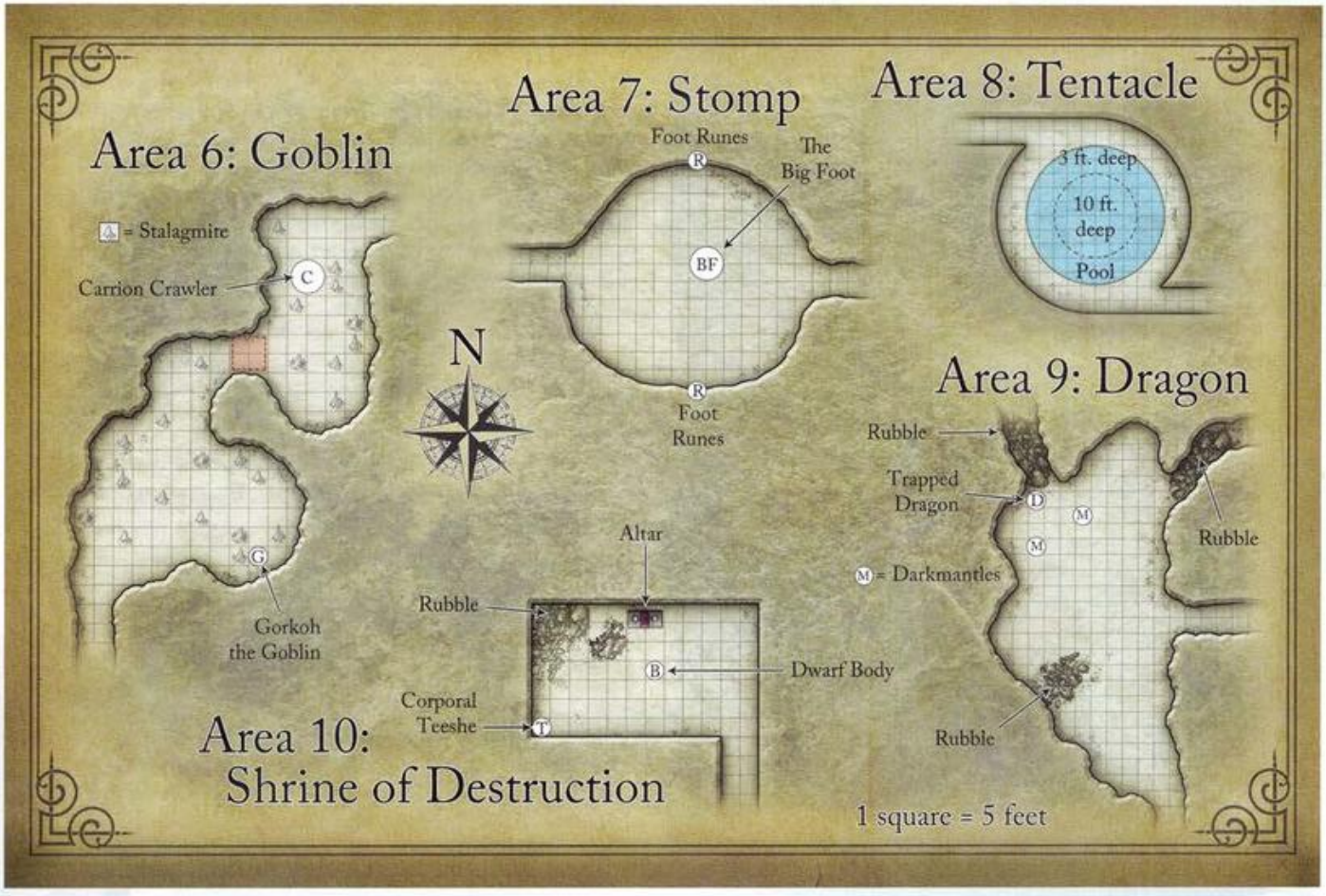
When the characters can see into this chamber, read:

> This enormous chamber is roughly circular with a high ceiling. A huge granite block is suspended near the ceiling in the center of the room, carved into the rough shape of what looks like a giant foot. Runes scribed into the north and south walls of the chamber create the outline image of a bare footprint.
>
> Scattered about the room are hundreds of rotting severed feet from countless types of humanoids. All the feet are bare. Despite the horrid wounds that severed the feet, you see no blood anywhere.

Creatures. Ten of the feet in the room are stomping feet, the lesser known and smellier cousins to the crawling claw. A stomping foot uses the **crawling claw** stat block with these changes:

- Its speed is 30 feet and it has no climbing speed.
- Its claw attack becomes a stomp attack that deals bludgeoning damage.

When any creature reaches the center of the room, the feet attack.



Map 1.3: Areas 6–10

The Big Foot. When the stomping feet attack, the suspended granite block activates, then acts on initiative count 0 each round. This magical hazard was created to crash down upon those who lack devotion to That-Which-Endures. As such, the Big Foot ignores any creature that gained the blessing of That-Which-Endures by submerging in all four pools in area 2. It targets one random creature each round, which must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage. The Big Foot ceases attacking if all the stomping feet are slain.

The rune-graven footprints on the north and south walls power the magic of the Big Foot. A character can deactivate the magic of the runes by standing within 5 feet of a footprint and using an action to succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check. Alternatively, a character who places their own bare foot on the wall inside the rune-marked footprint automatically succeeds at deactivating those runes. Deactivating both footprints halts the Big Foot's attacks.

Development. A murderer in Waterdeep has been killing people, taking their feet, and placing them on an altar hidden in the city as a sacrifice to That-Which-Endures. (A hint of the killings is noted in the "Life in Waterdeep" sidebar earlier in this episode.) Any feet placed on the altar teleport to this room. By placing clues on the feet that lead to the murderer, you can create a side trek mystery for the characters. You can also have two more feet suddenly appear in midair near the ceiling, then drop into the room as the adventurers fight.

8. Tentacle

When the characters investigate this chamber, read:

> The tunnel opens into a round room. Dirty brown water—sewage, judging by the smell—streams from pipes in the ceiling into a massive cesspool at the center of the room. A ten-foot-wide walkway skirts the pool, leading to a passageway on the other side.

Cesspool. Untold numbers of sewer pipes from the city empty their waste here. The first 10 feet of the cesspool are only 3 feet deep, but the inner area is 10 feet deep.

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check recalls this bizarre cesspool as the experiment of an ambitious Masked Lord of Waterdeep from decades ago. After locating a gate to a demiplane of filth, the Masked Lord attempted to build a sewer system that could empty the city's waste into that plane. It worked well, and plans were made to expand the sewer system beyond the prototype. But then creatures native to the plane of filth came through the gate in the wrong direction. After hiring mercenaries to drive the creatures back, the city rulers abandoned the plan, and the gate was sealed.

Or at least that's what everyone thought. A character who succeeds on a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana, Nature, or Religion) check can sense that planar magic still fills

this area. The stones of the cesspool likewise radiate conjuration to a *detect magic* spell or similar effect.

Creature. A massive creature on the demiplane of filth has reached a long tentacle through the weak planar barrier here. The creature's tremorsense allows it to detect the presence of creatures in this room, at which point it attacks. Each character must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice ripples on the cesspool before the tentacle emerges. If the characters know the room's story or sensed the magic here, they have advantage on the check. The tentacle surprises anyone who fails the check.

The enormous tentacle uses the stat block of a **giant constrictor snake** with these changes:

- It can reach anywhere inside this room.
- It has no bite attack.

A creature grappled by the tentacle is pulled immediately into the 3-foot-deep section of the cesspool. On the next round, if the creature is still grappled, the tentacle pulls it into the 10-foot-deep section and under the sewage. There, the tentacle has three-quarters cover, and the creature can't breathe. A creature that falls unconscious while grappled beneath the sewage is pulled through the planar rupture into the filth plane, to be devoured and lost forever. Or, in grand Acquisitions Incorporated fashion, a character so destroyed might return later as a vile creature bent on revenge against its former party members.

9. Dragon

A wyrmling brass dragon wound up in this cavern after a green dragon chased it away from its territory. (This is the green dragon mentioned in the "Life in Waterdeep" sidebar.) The wyrmling, which calls itself Dabshabah, entered a sea cave near Waterdeep that contained a passage leading to this complex of tunnels and caverns. She was hiding when the earthquake struck, and was trapped beneath fallen rubble.

When the characters enter the chamber from the south, Dabshabah is fending off a pair of darkmantles, so they can hear the fight before they see it.

> A small, brass-colored dragon thrashes madly at the far end of the cavern, trapped beneath two large boulders that block a northern tunnel. Two dark creatures resembling flying squids dart just out of the little dragon's reach, harassing it. Another northern tunnel is also blocked with rubble. Only a tunnel to the east stands clear of debris.

Creatures. The two **darkmantles** understand that the dragon is doomed to eventually die of its wounds, and that they can have an easy meal in a few hours if they bide their time. They are thus staying out of the dragon's reach. Dabshabah can't use her breath weapon against the darkmantles because the weight of the boulders makes it hard for her to breathe.

When the characters engage the darkmantles, the monsters ignore the dragon to focus on the new threat. Both creatures fight to the death.

Aftermath. If the characters defeat the darkmantles, Dabshabah (a **brass dragon wyrmling**) is thankful. If they use magic to heal the wounds she suffered during the earthquake, she is even more grateful. However, she expresses that gratitude with an inflated sense of her importance in the world. Remember that dragons aren't like people. Even the good ones can be haughty, proud, entitled, demanding, self-involved, and prone to violence. (Okay, maybe they are like people.)

Dabshabah is less than a year old, and she shares the story of how a green dragon attacked her and her siblings, driving her away from her mother's territory and down the Sword Coast. She can also confirm that she saw an armed and armored female human—Sergeant Ava Teeshe—pass through this chamber and head east some hours ago. Dabshabah kept silent, fearing the human would slay her.

Ahghairon's Dragonward. Waterdeep is protected by a magical ward that keeps dragons from entering the city. The ward doesn't reach this far below ground, so Dabshabah is safe here. However, if the characters attempt to bring her out of the fissure, she can't follow them. The dragon whines and sobs when it becomes

> Large capital assets such as dragons are a good investment. But you need to remember to record them on your balance sheet at the original cost minus depreciation due to the minor dismemberment or occasional consumption of staff.
>
> —Môrgæn

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A Powerful Pet

It might be fun to run Dabshabah as an NPC member of the party for a bit. However, any dragon—even a chaotic good wyrmling—can be tough to manage. Townsfolk are likely to be terrified at the prospect of a dragon coming into their shops and taverns. Moreover, caring for Dabshabah to her own high standards, including meeting her needs for sustenance and treasure, is equivalent to maintaining a character in a wealthy lifestyle.

That said, having Dabshabah stay with the party for a short time, then take off on her own to learn the business of being a dragon, could provide a bit of poignant narrative in your campaign. Much later on, if the characters are ever facing long odds in an important battle, Dabshabah might swoop down from the sky to return the favor the heroes once did for her.

clear that the characters must leave her behind. Arranging to meet somewhere outside the city quiets her, but Dabshabah demands assurances that the party won't abandon her.

10. Shrine of Destruction

In this final area of the caverns, the characters discover the missing City Watch guard, the dead dwarf who caused all this mess—and a magical mystery that kicks off the rest of the adventure. When the characters enter this area, read:

> This crumbling chamber is dominated by an altar against the far wall, above which hangs some kind of construct gearwork mechanism ending in a massive maul. The wall to the left of the altar has fallen in to spread rubble across the floor. On the floor near the altar is a golden device resembling an orrery housing. The device is battered and falling apart, revealing exposed gears and spokes, and with its exterior pieces and plating scattered across the floor. Splayed on the ground next to the device is the corpse of a dwarf.
>
> In the southwest corner of the room stands a muscular female human dressed in the livery of the Waterdeep City Watch. Her eyes are closed, and she breathes deeply as though resting.

The dead dwarf is Caerhan Coalsmith. Sergeant Teeshe stands in the corner. The magical housing of the *Orrery of the Wanderer* sits before the altar.

Creatures. Teeshe touched the altar when she first entered this area, and a spirit loyal to That-Which-Endures possessed her (see below). If the adventurers touch or disturb anything in this chamber (including the altar, the gearwork maul, or Teeshe herself), the spirit controlling Sergeant Teeshe forces her to attack. Use the **thug** stat block for her in this state.

Entropy Guardian. The gearwork device above the altar is called an entropy guardian, and it animates 1 round after Teeshe attacks. The entropy guardian's expanding clockwork arms allow it to attack anywhere in the room, but it cannot attack beyond it. On initiative count 10, it makes two attacks per round: +4 to hit, 7 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage. The damaged entropy guardian is a Huge object with AC 18, 32 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. It focuses its attacks on intruders within 5 feet of the altar, anyone fighting with Sergeant Teeshe, and anyone holding the orrery housing (which its magic recognizes as an ongoing threat).

Altar. The altar is made of granite and covered in runes. It accepts offerings by destroying them with the attacks of the entropy guardian, representing the entropic power of That-Which-Endures. However, the ancient altar malfunctioned when Caerhan set the orrery housing on it—or perhaps the orrery channeled its own powerful magic to destroy the altar in self-defense. Either way, that pulse of power caused the earthquake, and saw the entropy guardian slay the unfortunate Caerhan when it took him as a threat to the shrine.

A character who touches the altar willingly must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by a spirit loyal to That-Which-Endures. While charmed in this way, the character must use its action each turn to attack any creature defiling the shrine. This effect lasts for as long as the affected creature remains in this area, but the compulsion also prevents the creature from leaving the shrine.

Sergeant Teeshe. The City Watch officer is under the sway of a possessing spirit from the altar, as noted above. She attacks any creatures that appear to be a threat to the shrine, but a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check allows a character to see the unfocused look in her eyes, as if she's not in control of her actions. If she can be removed from this area, the altar's power over her ends, and Teeshe comes back to her right mind. If the characters save her, the sergeant offers a *potion of healing* in thanks. She doesn't remember what happened to her after entering the tunnels with Constable Boot, and is keen to accompany the characters back out.

Development. If a character tries to identify the runes on the altar, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check determines only that they are connected to no known deity, but that their symbology associates them with the power of destruction and ruin. The magic of the altar and the gearwork maul is faltering, but would once have been capable of destroying even powerful magic items.

Any character who succeeds on the above check or on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check to study the destruction here determines that a powerful pulse of magical power centered in this area is likely what caused the earthquake. The character also intuits that with the shrine's destructive magic curtailed by the earthquake, it is no longer a threat.

The Orrery. The *Orrery of the Wanderer* is a powerful magic artifact, detailed in appendix D. In its present state, the orrery has been battered by the entropy guardian, though its six-sided form remains intact. Its side plating is mostly missing, but can be collected from the floor nearby. If characters replace any of the shattered side plating, it magically reattaches itself. More oddly, if

the characters don't replace the plating, it begins to regrow, even as the orrery housing magically straightens itself out.

Within a few days, the orrery housing is a pristine, golden six-sided device with a circular hole in each face. The setup of gears and attachments within the orrery makes it clear that six round components are meant to be placed into the device. Characters will not recall seeing any such devices in the shrine of destruction.

Exiting the Fissure

With Sergeant Teeshe saved (or with her body in tow and a convenient cover story), the characters can make their way back to the sinkhole. If they left any dangers behind them on their initial pass, those dangers reemerge on the trip back—and will prevent them from fulfilling their contract if not eliminated.

When the characters climb out of the sinkhole, Captain Truff is waiting for them alone, and is pleased to see them. She's even more pleased if the characters rescued Sergeant Teeshe. Truff asks the characters to sign an affidavit confirming that they've completely investigated and cleared the passages beyond the fissure. If the characters lie about the success of their mission, they risk a fine, imprisonment, or both.

The characters must also agree to have all the goods they found beneath the city inventoried. If anyone later claims to be the rightful owner of any of the loot, a magistrate might rule that the goods belong to the original owner instead of the characters. Who knew adventuring required so much paperwork?

Dock Ward Ambush

While the NPCs and characters are going over their bookkeeping, a group of villains working for the Xanathar Guild tries to take any treasure the party pulled out of the tunnels. The group consists of a **thug** called Stork leading three **bandits**. Stork believes she has the advantage over the party members, who are probably coming out of the tunnels bruised and bloodied. Plus, she's already bribed the two City Watch guards, Orvis Torval and Rosko Bosh, to "take a walk," so neither is on hand during the attack.

Captain Truff fights alongside the characters, as do Gorkoh and Sergeant Teeshe if the characters rescued them. Otis Adalgrim might show up too, either during or after the fight.

Conclusion

With this first episode completed, the characters attain 2nd level! But even as they get to bask in the warm glow of that achievement, they must return to Acquisitions Incorporated to report. Omin Dran is there to meet with them when they do. If the characters were successful and dealt with Captain Truff in good faith, Omin gives them the promised reward of 400 gp for the group (500 gp minus the Acquisitions Incorporated fee). If the characters were only partly successful, adjust Omin's reaction and what follows as necessary.

Having since learned about the initial mistaken identity when he met the characters, Omin is even more impressed by their success. Or he might be in the mood to demand favors from them if things didn't go entirely as planned (because that kind of mess makes the whole company look bad). Either way, read:

> "I've been told about the misunderstanding regarding your identities. I can't say much for your relative inexperience and lack of skill. But it looks as though you've got enough moxie to cover for that. And a willingness to do what it takes to get ahead. Those are traits we hold in high regard here at Acquisitions Incorporated."
>
> Omin pulls a map from a satchel and places it on the conference room's oak table. "You know the town of Phandalin? Just off the Triboar Trail? A few months back, we awarded a group a franchise there. We received word that they were taking control of some ruined estate for their headquarters, and everything seemed to be going well. Only they missed this month's franchise payment, and their secretarian isn't answering any calls."
>
> Omin snaps his fingers, and a paper, a pen, and an ink pot leap from his satchel. "This note gives you the right to travel to Phandalin and investigate the franchise there on my behalf. If you find the franchise in poor standing or otherwise in distress, I want a full report. And depending on how badly the last group botched things, I might look to you to take over. A failed franchise makes the whole company look bad. I'm sure you understand."
>
> Omin then levels a hard stare. "I want you to appreciate what an incredible opportunity this is for you. You're skipping countless steps in the normal franchise process. No internships. No tests. It's unheard of. But I believe in you."

As before, Omin Dran is a busy CEO, and doesn't have time for a lot of questions. If the characters discuss finding the mysterious orrery housing, he tells them to make researching the relic part of their mission. With the characters all newly minted, official Acquisitions Incorporated employees, Omin trusts that they'll know what to do.

Franchise Downtime

Once the characters formally establish their franchise at the end of episode 2, downtime activities and franchise tasks will play a bigger role in the adventure. For now, though, encouraging the players to engage in downtime activities before heading off for Phandalin can help them get comfortable with the idea of dedicating nonadventuring time to personal and business development.

A few possible downtime activities are suggested below, but the party's downtime escapades can include anything that you and the players come up with.

The Orrery

Learning more about the mysterious orrery could be undertaken as basic research, which might lead later to

a more thorough investigation with the scrutineering activity (see "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" in chapter 2). Whatever approach the characters take, remember that learning the full scope of the orrery's history, the secrets of its creator, and the range of its powers is the goal of the whole campaign. Whatever small bits of information can be revealed at the outset should hint at even more that remains to be discovered.

Dragonsitting

If the players helped Dabshabah, they might want to check up on the wyrmling. Helping her fully heal up and regain the use of her fire breath and sleep breath might require research or a customized use of the recuperating downtime activity (both from the *Player's Handbook*.) If the characters want to arrange for someone else to watch over the young dragon, finding a suitable guardian might require research. Or the characters might decide to sow positive rumors in the area where the dragon wants to settle (using the sowing rumors activity from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*), hoping to get the locals used to the idea.

Altared States

Characters interested in the strange altar under Waterdeep can undertake research to study its mysterious runes, which can lead to information regarding That-Which-Endures (see the sidebar in the "New Race: Verdan" section in chapter 3.) Gorkoh the goblin might assist with this task if the characters keep him around, as a kind of warm-up for the rules for letting NPCs run franchise tasks (which the characters will gain access to at the end of episode 2).

In the long term, Gorkoh could take the lead in the scrutineering activity to research the shrine, or set up a shady business practice to restore part of the altar's power and arrange clandestine tours into the caverns by those who want other dangerous relics destroyed. See "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" in chapter 2 for more information on those new activities.

Continuing the Adventure

With contracts in hand and downtime done, the characters can make the trek from Waterdeep to Phandalin. Episode 2 of this adventure details that trip and the new mysteries the characters encounter as they arrive in town, attempt to sort out what happened to the previous franchise—and start to build their own franchise as the newest members of Acquisitions Incorporated!

Episode 2: Fun in Phandalin

In episode 2, Omin Dran sends the adventurers (now 2nd level) to Phandalin to learn the fate of an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise that opened there a few months earlier but has recently gone dark. After overcoming hazards on the road, the characters enter the town. There, they learn that the franchise had signed an agreement to purchase the oft-ruined Tresendar Manor, a small estate on the outskirts of town. However, something catastrophic occurred at the manor recently, and no one in town has seen any of the occupants since.

While in Phandalin, the adventurers have the opportunity to interact with the townsfolk, possibly becoming involved in small-town dramas—including a mayoral election. Those events could have a significant impact on the franchise the characters will establish at the end of this episode.

At the ruins of Tresendar Manor, the characters find clues about what caused the destruction. They locate one of the two surviving members of the previous franchise, the half-orc majordomo Gildha Duhn. Gildha provides details about the attack and the apparent goal of those who struck the manor—retrieving a mysterious magic clockwork device that the characters recognize as part of the magic orrery found under Waterdeep. Investigating where the attackers slipped into the manor's basement and dungeon, the characters discover signs of recent rituals tapping into the power of the Far Realm—and take on the monsters the attackers left behind.

After dealing with the threats in the dungeon, the characters run into operatives from Dran Enterprises who have been sent to take control of the site. With the imminent dangers in and around Phandalin neutralized, the characters are rewarded by Head Office with the license to take over the failed Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. From there, they are set to investigate who was behind the attack on Acq Inc, and what connection the mysterious orrery might have to this new threat.

Layers of Villainy

Although the characters have no way to discover this fact at present, the attack on Tresendar Manor was carried out by operatives working for the Six. That dark cabal of dark individuals wants to bring dark forces into the world—and its members have a specific motive of wanting to destroy Acquisitions Incorporated in the process. However, most of the agents involved in the attack had no idea they were working for the Six. All were hired individually and clandestinely by one of its members—the goblin Splugoth the Returned, who made no mention of his identity or allegiance.

The appearance of Dran Enterprises at the end of this episode is meant very much to imply that the organization was involved in the attack—and to distract the characters and the players alike from speculating on what other nefarious operators might be involved. The plots of the Six are revealed over the course of the adventure. More information on the Six, Splugoth, and Dran Enterprises can be found in "Factions and Rivals" in chapter 3, and in appendix B.

Traveling to Phandalin

The trek from Waterdeep to Phandalin requires the adventurers to travel north on the High Road, then head east along the Triboar Trail before taking the track south into town. Walking at a normal pace, it takes about 6 days to travel from Waterdeep to the head of the Triboar Trail, 1 day to hike along the Triboar Trail to the track to Phandalin, then another 4 hours to reach the town.

The Ruins of Tresendar Manor

Overland Adventuring

This first part of the episode features three encounters covering the journey from Waterdeep to Phandalin, all of which offer connections to the rest of the adventure. If you want your campaign to move at a quick pace, run only these encounters. In doing so, you don't have to worry about random encounters and setting up details of the journey such as who keeps watch when the characters camp.

If you prefer to emphasize the dangerous nature of the adventuring life for lower-level characters, random encounters can be used to create additional tension along the road. As characters gain levels and access to diverse powers, random wilderness encounters become less of a threat, so this is a great point in the campaign to use random encounters to challenge the party.

When using the Random Encounter table on the facing page, roll once for travel during the day and once while the characters are resting at night. Or if you see an encounter that tickles your fancy, just run it.

Free-Market Lizardfolk

As the party skirts the Mere of Dead Men on the High Road, they come across a lizardfolk being intimidated and harassed by an unscrupulous Zhentarim merchant and his bodyguards.

This part of the High Road runs parallel to the Mere of Dead Men, a swamp full of dangers, pestilence, and death. Alongside the road, a lizardfolk is pleading with a male human dressed in black leather. Behind the dark figure, two bugbears stand with their morningstars drawn, staring at the lizardfolk with menace in their eyes.

The human shouts loudly enough for you to hear. "Not acceptable! Friends, show this walking fish my displeasure."

The lizardfolk starts to argue, saying, "I am not a fish. I am—" But the bugbears interrupt with the hafts of their weapons, knocking the wind out of the lizardfolk and driving it to its knees. The poor creature catches sight of your party, looking at all of you with a pleading expression.

Rasqel, a Zhentarim-backed merchant (NE male human **bandit**), entered into a business agreement with this female **lizardfolk** named Thetsis, who is a leader of her tribe. The two **bugbears**, Jutt and Meff, act as Rasqel's muscle.

Development. If the characters attempt to involve themselves in the altercation, Rasqel rudely orders them to go do things that are possible only during one of the

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less-restrained services in a temple of Loviatar. If the characters fail to leave after this warning, Rasqel gives them an ultimatum: they can walk away or face the wrath of the Zhentarim.

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check can tell that Rasqel seems unsure about the bite behind his threat. His little operation is off the books, with no sanction from his superiors in the Black Network. The bugbear bodyguards know this fact too, and because of it, they are less than enthusiastic about working for Rasqel.

Tactics. If the characters refuse to back down after the second warning, Rasqel orders the bugbears to attack while he hangs back. They obey reluctantly, but if it becomes clear that their lives are in danger at any point, or if the characters offer 10 gp or more to each of them, they walk away and leave their boss to his fate. Rasqel, who is indebted to bad people, fights to the death. If the situation looks grim for the adventurers, Thetsis enters the fray.

Treasure. The bugbears carry nothing of value, as Rasqel has not paid them in several days. The bandit carries 25 gp in his belt pouch.

Franchise Opportunity. If the characters aid her, Thetsis shares the story of her business arrangement with Rasqel. The bandit originally worked a fair deal with Thetsis and her lizardfolk tribe, whose members grow and harvest a nutrient-rich algae that is also a key ingredient for creating *potions of water breathing*. After earning the tribe's trust, Rasqel altered the terms of the deal in stages, starting by offering less money in a "slow market," then taking the algae with a promise to pay later, saying his cash flow was poor. When the lizardfolk began to balk at this arrangement, Rasqel threatened to send mercenaries to their home deep in the Mere of Dead Men, promising to destroy the tribe unless the lizardfolk worked for free. That threat was the cause of the altercation the characters witnessed.

The characters might easily recognize that this situation is a prime business opportunity. If not, suggest that realization to a character with a merchant-related background, or one who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check. Thetsis carries algae that she's willing to sell for 50 gp, but which is worth 100 gp in Waterdeep. More importantly, any character with herbalist or alchemist experience realizes

Random Encounters

d10 + d10	Encounter
2	Four **bullywugs** are looking for easy prey, and are quick to mistake the party for such.
3	A **unicorn** approaches the characters, searching for its friends (two **satyrs**) who became intoxicated and wandered off looking for trouble.
4	Four elf **scouts** search for an ogre that has been pillaging the area. The elves have lost the trail, but they warn the characters about the giant.
5	Four **adult myconids** hide among a patch of giant mushrooms. They are looking for two **myconid sprouts** that wandered too close to the trail.
6	Two **satyrs** (see above) stalk the party while intoxicated, looking to play pranks on travelers.
7	A **swarm of ravens** harasses the party. If offered food, the ravens never let the characters alone.
8	Six **goblins** demand a 10 gp toll. If Gorkoh is present, the adventurers might be able to talk the goblins out of a fight.
9–11	No encounter
12	Twenty-year-old young lovers Bertice (half-elf **commoner**) and Grovet (human **commoner**) are traveling from Phandalin to Waterdeep to start a life together. See Edermath Orchard in "Locations in Phandalin" later in this episode.
13	Two **giant wasps** dart from the woods, looking for a little fresh meat.
14	Four **boars** cross the path. The largest one has a gold necklace worth 50 gp wedged in its mouth, dangling from one tusk.
15	Two **dire wolves** chase eight pilgrims (**commoners**). If the adventurers drive the wolves off, the pilgrims offer 10 gp as thanks.
16	A locked box sits on the side of the road, having fallen off a wagon. A successful DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools unlocks the box, inside which are five vials of holy water and five vials of antitoxin. Smashing the box open works automatically but breaks 1d10 vials.
17	Two **draft horses** run free along the road. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check can claim them.
18	A **swarm of poisonous snakes** has formed in the road. A successful DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check allows the party to avoid the swarm. Otherwise, the swarm attacks.
19	An **archmage** named Guthildi gathers spell components in the forest off the road. If the adventurers treat the eccentric spellcaster well, she shares food and drink with them. If they treat her poorly, she teaches them a nonlethal lesson.
20	Kofutacti, a **young green dragon**, is touring the Sword Coast looking for trouble (see the "Life in Waterdeep" sidebar in episode 1). Thankfully for the characters, the dragon is a cowardly sort that prefers intimidation to combat, and which backs away from most fights. Kofutacti is the dragon who hunted Dabshabah in episode 1, which could be interesting if the brass wyrmling is with the party, or if the green dragon catches her scent on one of the characters if they've been in recent contact with her.

that the algae can be mixed with other reagents costing 150 gp to make a *potion of water breathing*. Such a potion might fetch up to 500 gp in a city such as Waterdeep or Neverwinter.

The Wrongness

After turning east from the High Road onto the Triboar Trail, the characters' travel slows a bit. The High Road is frequently traveled by caravans, and so is better kept and easier to traverse. Triboar Trail, on the other hand, sees less frequent traffic and is less well maintained.

After a few hours' travel east, the adventurers come upon the following scene.

> Sitting cross-legged in the middle of the road is an odd-looking figure wearing not a stitch of clothing. In one hand, he fiddles with a copper medallion etched with the image of a thin, tangled pair of antlers. He might be a beardless dwarf, or a short and pale half-orc, or a human with a gland condition. Either way, he doesn't look up as he speaks in a voice that sounds like a goat choking on sawdust.
>
> "Fortune has strange and wonderful and terrible things in store for you. So I am here as fortune's lackey. Fair or foul? Weal or woe? Chant or howl? Friend or foe?"

This unfortunate wanderer is named Carkuss (N male human **priest**). A character who has an appropriate background or who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check recognizes the copper medallion as a holy symbol of Beshaba. Known as the Lady of Misfortune, Beshaba is Tymora's twin sister and archenemy. This character knows that Beshaba sends her favored souls out into the world as a focus for bad luck and calamity, and that dealing with a favored soul of the Lady of Misfortune is a risky situation. Interacting with such agents in any way can draw Beshaba's ire, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

The Hands of Fate. Now that Carkuss has crossed paths with the adventurers, they are stuck in the strands of his web of misfortune. To avoid the curse of Beshaba (see below), the characters must not harm Carkuss, they must not be overly kind to him, and they must correctly answer a riddle he asks. If successful on all three counts, each character earns a d10. Once before the character's next long rest, they can roll the die and add the number rolled to one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw. In addition, by earning Carkuss's favor, the characters might see him when they need good fortune later, if you so decide.

If the characters fail at any of these three tasks, one or more of them (at your determination) earns the curse. If the characters attack Carkuss, he doesn't defend himself, hoping that they slay his miserable form so his soul can be free.

The Riddle. After initial interactions with the characters, Carkuss asks the following riddle:

I stand aloof, alone as a savior.
I shine my oily smile across the rippling vastness.
I, with this beaming, attract and repel.
Ignore me, and you are lost, one way or another.
What am I?

The answer is a lighthouse—a foreshadowing on behalf of fate of where the characters will go in episode 3.

Curse of Beshaba. Beshaba inflicts her curse upon any cleric character who doesn't worship her, or the character who has the most interaction with Carkuss. She might target more than one character, especially anyone who worships Tymora. While under the curse, a character has disadvantage on saving throws. The subject knows the curse can be ended with *remove curse* or similar magic, or it can be passed to another person.

To pass the curse, the victim can choose a living humanoid within 5 feet of it once per day, making a Charisma check contested by the target's Charisma check. If the cursed victim wins, the curse transfers to the new target. If unsuccessful in transferring the curse, the victim takes 5 (1d10) psychic damage. A target who resists the transfer is immune to the curse of Beshaba for one year. Passing the curse on to an innocent person is an evil act.

An NPC victim of the curse has a chance to die of a terminal case of bad luck. For each day that passes, roll a d20 and a d12. If both dice show a 1, the NPC dies in a freak accident. The curse is gone, but if word of the death reaches the character who transferred the curse, the consequences might live on.

Business Opportunities

The "Free-Market Lizardfolk" encounter is just one of the many business opportunities that mark a long-running Acquisitions Incorporated campaign. Forward-thinking adventurers can make a deal with Thetsis and her tribe that might help them corner the market on *potions of water breathing*. The terms of the deal are up to you, but it's best to start small. Once per month, the lizardfolk can meet the adventurers or their agents to sell them algae. As the characters start to hire franchise staff at the end of this episode, this is a perfect opportunity to set up how staff members can conduct franchise business with no direct involvement from the characters—at least not to start.

These kinds of side ventures can easily expand to become adventures of their own. For example, one of the franchise NPCs handling the algae trade might fail to return from the Mere of Dead Men one day. The characters need to find out what happened if they want to keep employee morale from tanking—and to keep the business relationship with the lizardfolk intact. Choices must be made and consequences faced, which are the hallmarks of a great campaign.

The "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" section in chapter 2 has more information about working ongoing business activities into the franchise's campaign story.

A Horse Is a Corpse, of Course

When the characters move off the Triboar Trail and onto the even-less-used track to Phandalin, they stumble into what looks like a by-the-numbers goblin ambush that turns into something much more bizarre. After an hour's travel, the characters come upon the following scene.

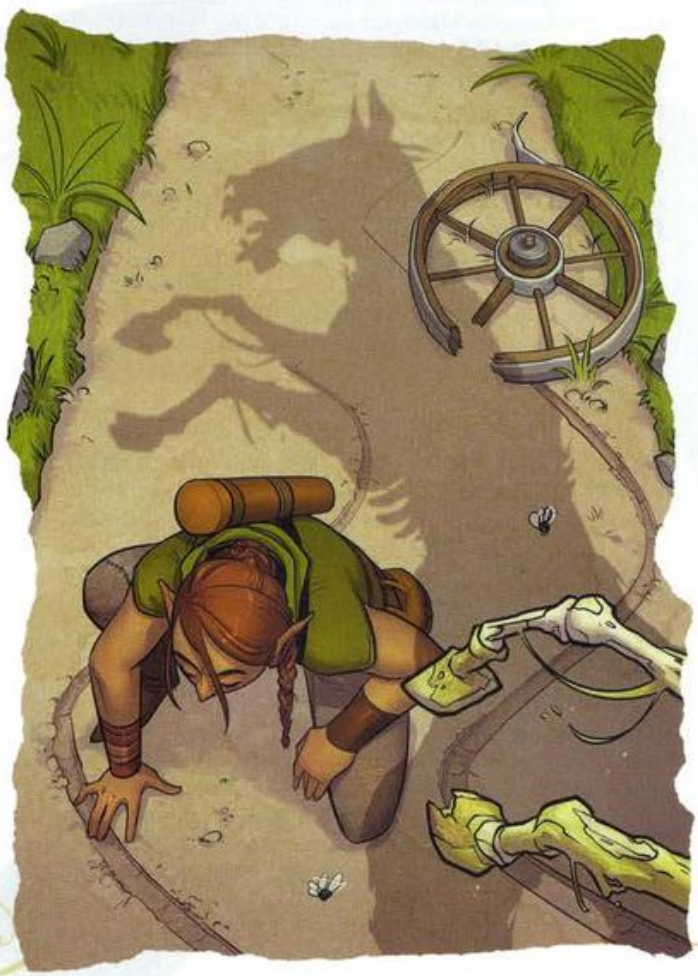
Ahead on the rough road, a pair of dead horses and an overturned cart block your way. Sacks and barrels spilled from the cart litter the ground. Trees grow close to the road here, and the thick undergrowth obscures the view beyond.

As the characters approach within 50 feet, any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that several goblins stand motionless in the underbrush, while several more perch in the trees. A character who succeeds on the check by 5 or more also notices that these goblins are dead, as does any character who attacks or attempts to interact with them. A closer investigation then reveals that they have been propped up and tied into their positions.

Creatures. The two dead horses are **warhorse skeletons** whose remaining flesh sloughs off as they fight. When any character comes within 20 feet of the fallen horses, these undead lurch to their feet and attack. When this happens, each character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or be surprised.

Tactics. The gnome archmage Hoobur Gran'Shoop animated these dead horses in the aftermath of the attack on Tresendar Manor, commanding them to lie still and attack any humanoid creatures that approach them.

Hoobur's Mark. If the characters poke around the rotting flesh that fell of the horses during the battle, they see that each horse bore scars on its sides that form the image of a draconic skull with a sword driven up through it from the bottom. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the sigil as part of a unique necromantic ritual that can turn any creature into an undead creature when it dies. (The characters will see this rune and this magic again later. See the sidebar "The Magic of Convenience" on the next page for more information.)



Treasure. Most of the crates, sacks, and barrels that litter the road and the wagon have already been emptied of valuables. One cask of Luskan Ice Mead remains intact among the looted goods, worth 50 gp in Phandalin. Alternatively, the characters can get 200 gp for it in Waterdeep, where patrons won't realize that ice mead is just normal mead in Luskan.

Arrival in Phandalin

After a harrowing and potentially lucrative journey, the characters arrive in Phandalin. Map 2.1 shows the layout of the small town, with key locations described in the sections below.

Read or paraphrase the following to set the scene:

This modest-sized town is comprised of some fifty buildings, most of which show signs of regular upkeep. Farms and an apple orchard mark the outer edge of town, with houses and shops closer in. Townsfolk are milling about in the central square and on the adjacent green. Two people stand on a stage on the green, addressing the crowd, but the distance to them—along with a steady chorus of cheers, boos, and shouts—obscures what's being said.

Rising from a small hill overlooking the town is an old manor house—or at least it was an old manor house. Most of its walls have collapsed in what appears to be a recent disaster, with traces of smoke still rising from piles of tumbled stone.

When the characters approach the stage or try to slip away, continue:

A portly, well-dressed male human on the stage points unexpectedly at your group and shouts. "You see? This is exactly what I mean! Just when things start to calm down in Phandalin, more murderous vagrants show up. They probably have something to do with what's happened to Tresendar Manor, and with the livestock that have started going missing! And it's only a matter of time before this all ends in misery and bloodshed, I promise you!"

Politics in Phandalin. Phandalin was long run by an elected townmaster, until trouble with bandits some years ago saw the townmaster replaced by a council of three prominent citizens, elected every two years. However, the recent abdication of one councilor and the town's growing size have prompted the townsfolk to decide that it's time to expand the council to five persons,

and to incorporate a mayorship to handle increasingly important decisions about Phandalin's future.

Two people, both current councilors, are running for mayor. One is Harbin Wester, a male human with the integrity and unctuous personality of ... well, a career politician. Wester is a former townmaster, and is running against Sildar Hallwinter, a male human, member of the Lords' Alliance, and former adventurer. Hallwinter is a circumspect sort who opposes Wester mostly because of the latter's corruption. For more information on both, see the "People of Phandalin" section.

Wester is the town's banker and a major landowner, so some consider his wealth and power to be ample justification for his greedy, conniving nature. More importantly, a number of monstrous and magical incidents in the area over many years have left Phandalin's citizens anxious for strong-sounding leadership. Even though adventurers solved many of the town's problems in the past, Wester has gained much popularity by convincing people that the town's troubles would have never surfaced if those well-armed wandering busybodies hadn't gotten involved in the first place. The banker has even gone so far as to suggest that adventurers might have orchestrated some of Phandalin's past woes for their own gain.

Sildar Hallwinter isn't a great orator. He spends most of his time refuting Wester's "unsubstantiated claims." The retired warrior also points out that Phandalin needs a leader who knows the dangers of the wilderness, even as its people need a mayor unburdened by scandal and potential conflicts of interest.

The characters can become involved in the mayoral debate if the players wish. If they don't, wrap it up and let the characters interact with the townsfolk as they see fit. Talking to any townsfolk yields up the information detailed in the "Recent Events in Phandalin" and "People of Phandalin" sections, below.

Recent Events in Phandalin

The Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose was the Acquisitions Incorporated franchise previously established in Phandalin. When that group arrived in town a few months ago, they spoke with Harbin Wester about acquiring the ruined Tresendar Manor, since the banker held the property's title. Wester worked out terms with Head Office and the deal was signed. The members of the franchise soon got to work on restoring the manor, frequently coming to town for supplies. When not slipping off to adventure for a few days here and there, most of their time was spent at the manor.

A number of days ago (the same day the franchise's payment was due to Head Office), the townsfolk heard explosions from the manor, with a few people reporting seeing gouts of flame and hearing the commotion of a battle. No one was really keen to investigate, wanting to avoid any trouble that the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose had brought on themselves. (Adventurers, right?)

When scouting a base of operations, consider how many of the local businesses in your area could be strong-armed into submission, or how many of the politicians could be replaced by a member of your own implausibly large family.

—Rosie Beestinger

The Magic of Convenience

The work of the gnome archmage Hoobur Gran'Shoop is a constant presence in episodes 2 and 3 of the adventure, even before his actual appearance toward the end of episode 3. Savvy players might note that the undead minions Hoobur creates to harry the party don't follow the standard rules by which a spellcaster character might create undead. Likewise, some of the creatures working for Hoobur do so in ways that aren't covered by *dominate monster*.

If the characters develop a strong interest in creating undead horses or summoning will-o'-wisps to their service, you can decide to reveal the "unique rituals" Hoobur knows, which can show up as treasure in the adventure or be something that the characters can learn through research. Otherwise, just assume that like many classic villains, Hoobur Gran'Shoop has access to whatever magic is necessary to advance the plot in the most interesting way.

But after a few days passed and no one from the manor came into town, Sildar Hallwinter braved the walk up the hill to investigate.

Where the manor once stood, he found only rubble, scorch marks, ruined construction, and bloodstains. He failed to discover the single franchisee left alive in the manor, who was unconscious at the time. The townsfolk have given the ruins a wide berth since then, not wanting to risk awakening whatever mad magic delivered the adventurers of the Golden Mongoose to their final fate.

Plots of the Six

Just over a year ago, operatives of the Six came across one of the components of the *Orrery of the Wanderer*—the *far gear*. Quickly realizing the potential power in the component and the orrery it was a part of, they began to scour the Sword Coast for information regarding the artifact. A month ago, their intelligence-gathering resources turned up word that two Acquisitions Incorporated franchises—including the newly minted Phandalin franchise—had been scrutineering for lore about mysterious magic clockwork devices. Wanting to determine what Acquisitions Incorporated might know about the orrery, the leaders of the Six put a plan into motion. (The second franchise was based on the Sword Coast between Neverwinter and Luskan. Its fate will be discovered by the characters in episode 3.)

The Six set up an agent in Phandalin—Ditch Fundi, who first raised and now runs Phandalin's new Temple of the Coin Maiden. Using Ditch's intelligence on the activities of the Company of the Golden Mongoose, the Six confirmed that the franchise held an orrery component called the *timepiece of travel*—and that Acq Inc head office was so far in the dark about their discovery. So the Six hired a number of agents—including archmage Hoobur Gran'Shoop—to attack both franchises.

Hoobur's forces snuck into Phandalin and razed Tresendar Manor to the ground. However, the Six operatives were unable to find the *timepiece of travel*. Knowing that one of the franchisees had teleported away from the fight, the agents assumed that the orrery component was gone. Unknown to them, the timepiece stayed behind, and remains in the possession of the survivor still buried alive in the rubble.

Map 2.1: The Town of Phandalin

Only two of the townsfolk have any information regarding the attack on Tresendar Manor. Ditch Fundi, a charlatan priest of Waukeen and agent of the Six, was installed in Phandalin a month ago to watch the franchise's activities and set up the attack. At the same time, Sister Garaele of Tymora works for Dran Enterprises, and has previously fed much information on the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose to her bosses. She knows no details of the attack, assuming that the Golden Mongoose adventurers either blew themselves up or summoned a monster they couldn't control. But she knows that Dran Enterprises is sending a team to clean up the mess and claim the manor. For more on these two, see the "People of Phandalin" section.

People of Phandalin

After the characters arrive in town and get involved in the mayoral debate (or don't), they can take the opportunity to interact with the townsfolk. With the destruction of Tresendar Manor still the talk of the town, the characters have no problem finding people with opinions on the fate of the previous Acquisitions Incorporated franchise.

The information presented in the "Recent Events in Phandalin" section can guide the NPCs' responses to the characters' questions. But beyond being sources of information, many of the NPCs in this episode have the potential to interact with the characters as allies, foes, or potential employees when their franchise comes together at the end of the episode. You should feel free to add your own NPCs as well, or change the ones provided to better fit the story you want to create with your players.

Have We Been Here Before?

The town of Phandalin will be recognizable to any players familiar with the *Lost Mine of Phandelver* adventure. This version of Phandalin is set five years or so after that adventure, making use of many of the original Phandalin locations and NPCs even as it adds new places and new characters to the mix. If you have your own version of Phandalin in your campaign, make any adjustments necessary to this episode for continuity.

Brawn McGable

Brawn (N male human **bandit**) is a middle-aged former member of the Redbrand Ruffians, a bandit gang that did their best to set up a reign of terror in Phandalin some years ago. Brawn came very late to the Redbrands' operation, and thus did only a little intimidation work with the locals before adventurers defeated the bandits and cleared their hideout in the dungeon of Tresendar Manor. He served a sentence on a work gang for his involvement with the bandits, but his affable personality won over many in town by the time of his release. He thus stayed on in Phandalin, where he works doing odd jobs and keeping a close eye on local goings-on.

Development. Brawn knows a great deal about Tresendar Manor, including the location and layout of its dungeon. Characters who talk to him about his past can

MIKE SCHLEY AND ROBERT LAZZARETTI

learn a few details of the entrance to the dungeons (see "Tresendar Manor" below). If effective roleplaying or ability checks get the characters on Brawn's good side, he can be convinced to provide further details of the layout of dungeon areas 1 through 8. However, he knows nothing about what the Golden Mongoose adventurers (and the agents of the Six) might have done to alter the features of the dungeon as he remembers it.

Over and above his general utility in a fight, Brawn has a way with people, a winning smile, and a sharp tongue. If the characters look at him as a potential employee, he makes a good retainer for the franchise, picking up or dropping off goods, making deals, or entertaining potential partners. If he joins the franchise and the characters encourage him, you might eventually upgrade him to use the stat block of a **spy**.

Ditch Fundi

A gnome named Ditch Fundi (LE female gnome **assassin**) runs the Temple of the Coin Maiden with the help of two female human **acolytes**, Hesten Jenz and Mischka Solmen. The two acolytes hold regular services, preach the gospel of Waukeen, and have gained the trust and favor of most of the townsfolk in the month the temple has been open. Ditch stays removed from public interactions, instead looking after the financial welfare of the temple.

Development. Ditch is an operative of the Six, planted in Phandalin a month ago to watch the Company of the Golden Mongoose—then to destroy the franchise when the time was right. She knows just enough about the teachings of Waukeen to talk a good game. The gnome does nothing to tip her hand, acting friendly toward the characters for as long as possible. However, if she ever maneuvers them into a position where she can easily destroy them, she does so.

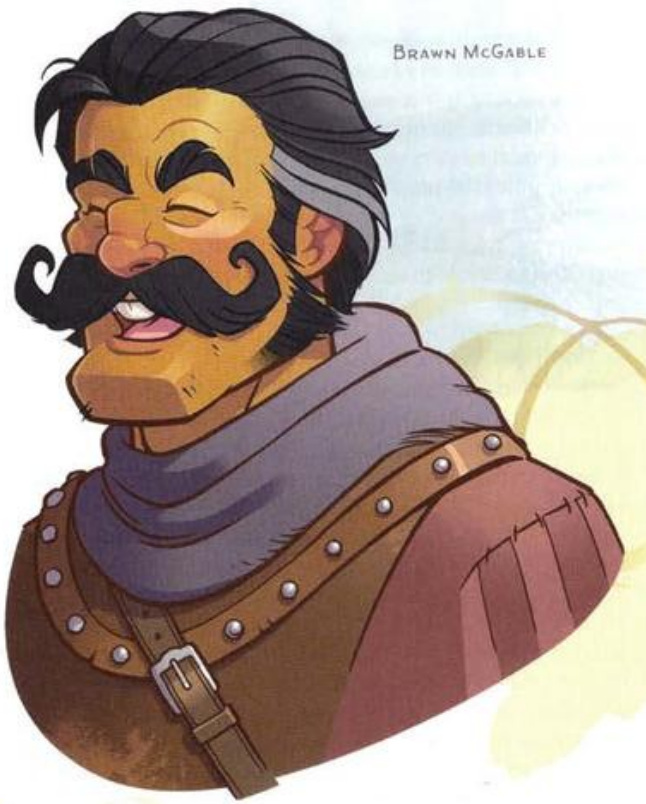
The acolytes know nothing of Ditch's treachery, assuming that her allowing them to take responsibility for temple services is a sign of her trust and their own ability. They defend her unless they learn the truth.

Phandalin ... Phandalin. Yeah, I know it. Temperate climate. Average rainfall eighteen inches per annum. Take that, Mrs. Brinbury! Give me a C+ in geography. Ha.

What? Oh, yeah, yeah. Phandalin. Quaint place. Full of rustic charm. Primary industries include ... gods, I don't know. Rocks and sheep? Oh, and a couple of very private festhalls. I can't tell you the number of times ...

Wait, why are you writing this down? Did Dran send you? Well ... I'm on my lunch break! Yes, I know what time it is! It's gin o'clock!

—Viari



Brawn McGable

Harbin Wester

Harbin Wester (N male human **noble**) knows only greed, power, and treachery. He is the wealthiest citizen in Phandalin, owning much of the land, many of the businesses, and a good portion of the wealth in the local area. He was the last townmaster before that position was dissolved in favor of a three-person town council, and has been a member of that council from its inception to the present day.

Wester is friendly until it suits him to be otherwise, so most locals don't think ill of him. However, he is more than capable of stabbing people in the back while keeping a fake grin on his face. He is cunning in the ways of business, knowing exactly who to bribe or threaten to get what he wants, but he's careful to keep most dealings aboveboard and "legal" so that no one can claim to have been treated unfairly.

Development. Even after pointing the characters out as "murderous vagrants" during the debate, Wester tries to be the first person to talk to them in private. Laughing off his claims as "political rhetoric," he offers to buy drinks and asks to hear the group's stories.

Harbin Wester is intended to be a political adversary. He invites the characters to explore the manor if they desire, reminding them that he still owns the place. He also tries to get the best of the characters, offering money, land, goods, or services to place them in his debt. Once this is done, he calls in those debts whenever it's convenient—and is not above asking the group to undertake morally questionable tasks as payment.

Wester never puts himself in a position where his foes can kill him without severe consequences. Several bodyguards (use the **thug** stat block) always watch over him. He also has extensive contacts and investments in Waterdeep and Neverwinter. With a message to either city, he can call in a large force of skilled mercenaries (**veterans**) to his aid.

DARREN M. A. CALVERT

Macklin Talctuft

Macklin Talctuft

Macklin (N dwarf **bandit**) is a young wanderer who came to Phandalin expecting to secure a job mining in the nearby hills. Once they arrived, the dwarf found no mining work to be had, and the jobs they've taken to make ends meet were terribly boring. Macklin has thus been draining their savings looking for any employment that inspires them. So far, nothing has fit the bill. Macklin wears their hair and beard in a mohawk style that underlines their general disinterest in tradition.

Development. Macklin had been preparing to seek employment with the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose before the disaster that leveled Tresendar Manor. If the characters take possession of the place, the young dwarf marches up to them and offers to oversee the reconstruction. Macklin is reliable and creative once their mind is engaged in a project. However, as an overseer, they are difficult to please, and other franchise employees or casual workers might come to resent their drive for perfection.

If Macklin joins the franchise and has the opportunity to do field work or adventuring, you might consider upgrading them to use the stat block of a **berserker**.

Minghee Graywind

Linene Graywind is the owner and operator of the Lionshield Coster (see the "Locations in Phandalin" section). Her daughter Minghee (NG female human **commoner**) knows that her mother expects her to take over the business in a few years—and she wants nothing to do with it. Minghee wants to travel, see the world, and make a name for herself, settling down only when she's ready. She works at the coster reluctantly, and tells anyone who'll listen how she wants to get away and do something different with her life.

Development. Minghee is quite outgoing, and she engages the characters excitedly the first time they visit the Lionshield Coster (or she seeks them out elsewhere if they don't). If the characters set up a franchise in Phandalin, she offers to be their roving representative, procuring goods and services from wherever the characters want to send her. Minghee has a great mind for numbers and a strong head for business, but if the characters take her into their franchise, she becomes restless if denied a regular chance to travel. In the long term, Minghee has the drive and instinct to pick up spellcasting (and use a new stat block of your choice) if any spellcasting character takes the time to mentor her.

If the characters take Minghee into their employ, Linene is heartbroken at first, but she soon sees the value in having her daughter working for an up-and-coming franchise. Opportunities might arise for the franchise to enter into an ongoing business arrangement with the Lionshield Coster—which might in turn raise the ire of Sharna Quirstiron at the Miner's Exchange (see below) if the coster's success threatens Sharna's own plans for economic domination.

Sharna Quirstiron

Sharna Quirstiron is the feisty dwarf overseer of the Phandalin Miner's Exchange. She took over that position after the former overseer (and third member of the

Minghee Graywind

DARRIN M. A. CALVERT ANDRUS

town council) Halia Thornton left Phandalin "to seek other opportunities." All the locals know that continual problems at nearby mines made Halia's job difficult, with little to no wealth coming into the exchange for months at a time. Unfortunately for Halia, the downturn in the mining industry was the least of her worries. The Manshoon sect of the Zhentarim saw an opportunity in Phandalin and had Halia killed. Sharna (LE female dwarf **bandit captain**) is the sect's agent. She aims to revive mining in the area, with the goal of making Phandalin a haven for the rogue faction of the Zhentarim.

Development. Sharna is thoroughly evil, but she's a fine actor. She has the economic interests of Phandalin at heart, but only because she hopes to have a prosperous town at her mercy when the needs of the Zhentarim become her focus. She ingratiates herself to the characters, hiring them to clear out monsters in the local area that threaten mining interests. She offers to partner up on business deals, sharing the profits of the mines if the characters invest their time or money in such operations. If the characters end up on the wrong side of Harbin Wester, she sides with them against the banker, concealing her goal of usurping his wealth and power. She encourages the characters to actively oppose Wester—or even to kill him if she thinks they might be amenable to the idea.

Sharna is a formidable combatant compared to most folk in Phandalin. She also keeps four bodyguards (**thugs**) on hand to guard the exchange, travel to the mines, rough up "uncooperative" people, or do the dark deeds she needs done to meet her objectives.

Sildar Hallwinter

Sildar (NG male human **knight**) is a retired adventurer and Griffon Rider of Waterdeep. Some years ago, he worked in the employ of the Rockseeker family, who had hoped to reopen mines in the hills and mountains surrounding Phandalin. After nearly being killed in a goblin ambush while traveling to Phandalin for the first time, Sildar's faith in himself was shaken. The Rockseeker family moved on after their troubled dealings in the town, but Sildar stuck around.

Although he is getting on in years, Sildar still trains with his weapons and keeps himself in shape. He was one of the town's three councilors prior to (as he puts it), "Halia Thornton leaving without even saying goodbye." By running for mayor against Harbin Wester, Sildar hopes to help Phandalin increase its prosperity—and to put that prosperity into everyone's pockets, not just Wester's. What he lacks in charisma, he makes up for in sincerity.

Development. Sildar is a member of the Lords' Alliance, a group of allied leaders concerned with the security and prosperity of the North. As such, his goals are to bring stability and wealth to the region. He is brave and honest, but nearly losing his life years before caused him to doubt not only his martial skills but also his decision making. He could prove to be a valuable ally to the characters, especially if he's elected mayor. However, he might also frustrate them with his passivity and indecisiveness—or allow them to take advantage of those same qualities to wield great influence over him.

Politics and Adventuring

An Acquisitions Incorporated campaign works best when it's running on many levels at once. One of those levels is the business aspects of the characters' lives, with satire another obvious side of the campaign. But politics can be another driving force in an Acq Inc story, as can the satirical treatment of people in power.

The political maneuverings taking place in Phandalin will inevitably have an impact on the characters and their franchise. Still, if the players aren't interested in the political aspect of the campaign story, don't worry about it. Wester is elected mayor, the players can play nice with him to get what they want, and the story moves forward. But if the characters care about who becomes mayor, they have plenty of opportunity to influence the outcome.

Sildar Hallwinter cares about the good of the town but is wishy-washy. His lack of charisma hurts his chances for election. But a clever group of adventurers working behind the scenes might be just what Hallwinter needs to energize his campaign. On the other hand, Harbin Wester controls much of the wealth in Phandalin, including Tresendar Manor. As such, helping Wester get elected—or at least not being too obvious about opposing him—can put the characters on his good side. Even if Wester loses the election, his power and wealth mean that the characters will be interacting with him—and dealing with his ability to make their lives easier or harder—whether they want to or not.

Another possibility is that one of the characters could run for office as a last-minute wild-card candidate. A stranger wandering into Phandalin is unlikely to gain the trust of enough citizens to win the race, and the need to stick around town and run things will eventually get in the way of the characters venturing all over the North being heroic. But don't discount the narrative possibilities involved in the characters embracing the political side of the story even more wholeheartedly than you expect them to.

Sister Garaele

Sister Garaele (CG female elf **priest**) was a zealous and enthusiastic servant in Phandalin's Shrine of Luck before Ditch Fundi, "the competition," arrived in town a month ago. Now, she is downright frenetic. She proselytizes for Tymora in the streets, in taverns, and in people's homes. Garaele is well known for haranguing the folk of Phandalin, claiming that the misfortune of previous years has been due to a lack of devotion to Tymora. Despite this, most locals like the priest, and are likely to help her if she's in trouble.

Development. Garaele was once an agent of the Harpers, though she has recently broken ties with that group of agents opposing the abuse of power. Since then, she has taken significant donations from Dran Enterprises, whose agents asked her to keep an eye on the members of the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose and any other Acquisitions Incorporated operatives in Phandalin. Garaele is happy to pass this information along in exchange for Dran Enterprises' payments to the temple, and she asks no questions about that organization's long-term goals for the town. She is a good person, however, so she won't knowingly allow harm to befall others. She is helpful to anyone willing to offer wealth, goods, or services to her shrine.

Stuuzant

Though not exactly people and no longer in Phandalin, a neutral **ogre** named Stuuzant is another potential source of information for the characters. She was one of the operatives used by the Six in the attack on Tresendar Manor, smashing her way through the site's walls. When the attack was over, the ogre wandered away. However, she decided to stick around the area to enjoy her proximity to lots of tasty livestock, even as she keeps her distance from anyone who might pester her.

In the days since the destruction of the manor, farmers and herders on the outskirts of Phandalin have reported seeing giant-sized footprints, both humanoid and canine, as well as missing animals. No one has spotted Stuuzant, as the ogre has good instincts for avoiding trouble. She keeps moving, hiding until the time is right to strike. When she attacks livestock, she does so when no one can see her, and she takes only what she needs to survive.

Development. Characters might be asked to look into the missing livestock, or they can do so on their own to get on the good side of the locals. Investigating the disappearances might be used to angle for something the characters want or need, such as supplies, a lower price on Tresendar Manor, citizens favoring one mayoral candidate over another, or whatever else you can think of.

Tracking down and defeating Stuuzant is no easy task, however. She is friends with a pair of **dire wolves**, and is mostly successful at covering her tracks after her raids. The ogre also has yet to establish a den in the area, so she rarely stays in one place for more than a day.

If the characters locate her, Stuuzant speaks Common quite well, uses smarter tactics than a typical ogre, and tries to bargain with the characters if it looks like they might defeat her. If questioned, she tells the story of being hired to attack the manor. A goblin in hooded robes paid her to help break into the estate and smash everything in sight. Stuuzant never saw the goblin's face, and knows nothing about the Six (which was never mentioned to her or any of the other hirelings).

Savvy characters might convince Stuuzant to take a position in their franchise, with the ogre making a great sentry or bodyguard. However, the townspeople might need assurances to accept such a creature living so close to their town.

Treasure. Stuuzant carries the 50 gp she was paid to help attack the manor.

Locations in Phandalin

As they explore Phandalin—and eventually set up their franchise in the town—the characters can engage with many of the town's businesses, whether as patrons or potential partners. The most prominent of the town's locations (as well as a few additional NPCs) are detailed in this section. You can come up with details for additional locations and NPCs based on the needs and desires of your players.

Edermath Orchard

The apple trees of Edermath Orchard surround a small group of buildings on the edge of town. The smell of fruit is strong around the orchard year round, with the apples grown and picked here processed throughout the winter into juice, cider, and other products.

Daran Edermath (NG male elf **scout**) established the orchard many years before. A former adventurer and one of the oldest people in Phandalin, he remains aloof from town politics and focuses his interest on the traveling merchants and food-related businesses in Phandalin that buy his wares. Daran employs down-and-out miners to do odd jobs and help during harvest, so he's popular among the town's working folk.

Development. Daran's half-elf daughter Bertice went missing the day before the destruction at Tresendar Manor, and he is beginning to fear for her. Most folk in town know that Bertice recently took up with a human miner named Grovet, who is also missing. If the characters met the couple on the road (see the "Random Encounters" table earlier in this episode), they can allay at least some of Daran's fears for his daughter's safety.

Earning Daran's full trust is a long-term proposition, and the characters must prove themselves beyond reproach in any dealings with the orchardist. If they do, however, the elf proves a valuable ally. He has more resources and power in town than his humble orchard might suggest. And as a member of the Order of the Gauntlet—an association of vigilant adventurers that seeks to overthrow evil—Edermath has the ear of powerful people up and down the Sword Coast.

Lionshield Coster

The Lionshield Coster is a trading post and competitor to the Phandalin Miners' Exchange. A weathered sign hanging above the front door depicts a blue lion painted on a wooden shield. Linene Graywind (NG female human **commoner**) manages the store, which is one of a chain of mercantile outposts spread up and down the Sword Coast. Mother to Minghee (see "People of Phandalin" above), Linene works tirelessly to keep the coster operational through good times and bad.

Most of the goods in the *Player's Handbook* can be purchased here. Linene can special order items for delivery in a few days (with a deposit, of course). However, she doesn't buy, procure, or sell morally questionable goods.

Phandalin Miners' Exchange

This trading post once acted as the central hub for mining activity in the area, as well as the authority for maintaining public records. A two-story building, the exchange bears a newly painted sign depicting two crossed pickaxes above a lump of gold. The first story is where business is conducted, while the second story contains living quarters.

As with the Lionshield Coster, most of the goods available in the *Player's Handbook* can be purchased here. Mining gear is also easily had—as are illicit goods, with Sharna Quirstiron's dispensation (see "People of Phandalin").

Shrine of Luck

Until a month ago, this temple to Tymora was the only shrine in town. With the Temple of the Coinmaiden (see below) newly established, Sister Garaele, the local

priestess, works harder each day to keep the attention of the faithful of Phandalin. See "People of Phandalin" for more information on Sister Garaele.

Sleeping Giant

This single-story tavern's better days have seen better days. Its weathered sign probably depicts a prone giant, but whatever paint or carvings once adorned the sign have been all but worn away. Inside, the place shows the same lack of care. It's dirty, ill kept, and in need of a thorough cleaning. Or burning.

The place is normally occupied by dwarf and human miners, either back from a stretch in the mines or waiting for a mine to reopen. They are not overtly hostile unless provoked, but it doesn't take much to provoke this unhappy lot. The owner and barkeep is Grista Kettlecopp (N female dwarf **commoner**). Surly to the point of rudeness, she tries to run her business her own way and stay out of the political and personal affairs of other townsfolk.

Development. The miners that frequent the Sleeping Giant are a rough lot, and could become a competent and formidable force if stirred up and pointed at a target. Currently, Sharna at the Miner's Exchange has their trust (see "People of Phandalin"), mostly for her assurances that the mines will soon be more prosperous than ever. If Sharna discovers that the characters are interfering with her and the Zhentarim's plans, she need only tell the miners that the characters are standing in the way of their gainful employment to inspire them to use their pickaxes for something other than mining. On the other hand, characters who earn the miners' good will can end up with numerous allies in Phandalin.

Smithy

This building contains an open area with a forge and several anvils, but the rest of the structure is closed off. Maza Fieldsalder (N female human **commoner**) took over the smithy a year ago, after the death of her master, Alger Frakk. As the master smith's apprentice, the powerfully built young woman earned her new position through hard work and talent, and she is well liked among the other townsfolk.

Development. Among the few people in town who are wary of Maza are those who question the nature of Alger's death—including a few malcontents who whisper that perhaps the young smith had a compelling reason to kill her master. Whether these rumors hold truth or are just the ramblings of a would-be ironworker who wants Maza's job is up to you.

Stonehill Inn

The Stonehill Inn is one of the largest buildings in town. The business is run by Trilena and Toblen Stonehill, assisted by their twelve-year-old son, Pip. (All are human **commoners**.) The Stonehills have comfortably weathered the changeable times in Phandalin since building the inn more than five years ago. The six-bedroom complex is tidy and clean, the table fare is good, and the company is pleasant.

Development. The Stonehills are unwitting soldiers in the war for power in Phandalin. Although they own and operate their business, they owe a small amount of money to Harbin Wester. The banker wants to take their business, and he keeps an eye out for any opportunity to gain the necessary leverage. He might use the characters to lean on the Stonehills if they end up owing him favors. Alternatively, if the characters befriend the Stonehills, they might become staunch allies in the family's attempts to keep Wester's hands off their business.

Property and Law

Many fantasy campaigns either ignore questions of law or utilize benevolent authoritarian figures to oversee social and economic justice—the wise monarch, the enlightened town council, the Masked Lords, and so forth. This method means that the law is stable. Higher authorities can be consulted on matters requiring arbitration, with concrete edicts handed down to make the line between right and wrong—in a civil sense, at least—crystal clear.

In Phandalin (as with many of the other locations in this adventure), the situation is not that simple. No king or council owns the lands of or around the town. Eminent domain is neither implied nor accepted. In most of the smaller settlements along the Sword Coast, the person with power is the individual who takes and holds that power. Locales still have authorities and laws, but the person who can kill everyone else—or pay someone to do so—is the one who truly rules.

In Phandalin, Harbin Wester is that person. Even if he loses the mayoral election, his monetary resources far outstrip those of anyone else in the town, leaving him in a position of strong economic control. However, part of Wester's power derives from subtlety. He is wary enough to watch out for anyone with the ability to effectively oppose him, and savvy enough to make sure that such people never have any reason to oppose him. As such, when the characters clean out Tresendar Manor and attempt to use it as the base for their new franchise, a potential for social and economic conflict arises.

Wester holds the mortgage on the manor. The legal entity that was the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose was the signatory to that mortgage, and unfortunately for Acquisitions Incorporated, the mortgage is now in arrears. The characters can work a deal to take over those payments, but the terms are steep. Fortunately, after the manor is cleared, Head Office is willing to negotiate for the manor's deed. (See the "Conclusion" section of this episode for more information.) This leaves Harbin Wester bitter, as he recognizes that having the favor of Acq Inc backing them up gives the characters more potential power in Phandalin than he likes.

As the rest of the campaign plays out, keep track of how Wester might try to take advantage of the characters and their deal. What if operatives of Dran Enterprises or representatives of the Six come to him? More importantly, if the characters directly oppose Wester and bring him low, what happens if a worse power steps in to take his place? The options are limitless. Do what challenges and entertains your players most!

Temple of the Coinmaiden

Half a year past, another general store in Phandalin called Barthen's Provisions went out of business. The building was purchased a month ago for the church of Waukeen by an unknown benefactor, and quickly reno-

vated with all the fineries necessary to draw the attention of the goddess of wealth. The gnome Ditch Fundi oversaw the temple's construction and dedication, and she now runs it in Waukeen's name. (In truth, the benefactor who built the temple is the Six, and Ditch Fundi is their agent. See her entry in "People of Phandalin" for more information.)

Town Council Hall

This one-story hall is the closest thing the people of Phandalin have to a government building. Long used as the town council's meeting room and the townmaster's hall before that, it is set to be expanded to include the new mayor's office after the election. As the two remaining members of the town council, Sildar Hallwinter and Harbin Wester currently share office space here.

Tresendar Manor

After the characters have met some of the locals and heard what's known about the events at Tresendar Manor and the disappearance of the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose, they can investigate the fallen manor and the dungeons beneath it. Once a small but elegant estate, the ruined building sits upon a hill overlooking Phandalin. Years of neglect had already done considerable damage to the structure, only some of which the Golden Mongoose adventurers had restored. But the recent attacks undid all that work, pulling most of the above-ground structure down.

The Ruins

When the characters reach the top of the hill and get a closer look at the ruins of Tresendar Manor, read the following:

> Many of the crumbled walls of the manor show signs of having been recently rebuilt, but even that newer stonework has been toppled and smashed, coating everything in the area with a thick layer of dust. Temporary structures seemingly set up to aid the reconstruction have been badly damaged by force and fire, though a couple of wooden buildings still stand amid the destruction.

As the characters draw closer, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) check reveals that the fire damage isn't natural, and that magic was likely involved. The same successful check allows a character to intuit that the stonework was not smashed by weapons or tools, suggesting that a creature of great size and strength took part in the destruction.

Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check can hear the jackals in the central courtyard of the manor before the group approaches that area.

Jackal and Hide

As the characters enter the ruined courtyard of Tresendar Manor, they find they are not alone.

> Numerous brown-and-gray jackals prowl the ruins. Some gnaw on bones, while others sniff and dig at a pile of stones at the center of the manor courtyard. In response to your approach, the nearest jackals turn toward you and snarl.

Creatures. A **jackalwere** called Hamebi leads a pack of ten **jackals** searching the ruins for survivors and treasure. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check after the fight starts notices that one of the jackals (Hamebi in animal form) wears a satchel slung across its back.

Tactics. Hamebi stays in jackal form, using her Sleep Gaze on the toughest-looking adventurer. If that target falls unconscious, three jackals quickly swarm the character. Hamebi flees if it looks like the characters might defeat her. She orders her jackals to cover her retreat, but they follow her lead the next round. She surrenders if she faces death with no way to escape.

Development. Hamebi works for the Six, although she doesn't know it. If captured, she can relate that a short, cloaked humanoid came to her in Neverwinter Wood two days ago, hiring her to bring her pack of jackals to Phandalin and search the ruins for bodies. This was Splugoth, unconvinced by Hoobur Gran'Shoop that the orrery component known to be held by the Golden Mongoose company is gone from the area; see the note in area 12 of the Tresendar Manor dungeons. Splugoth wanted creatures with keen scent to make another attempt at locating any franchise dead.

Treasure. Hamebi's satchel holds 50 gp and a *potion of climbing*.

Level Inappropriate

"The Orrery of the Wanderer" makes use of an adventure trope as old as D&D itself—working up a totally high-powered artifact, then dropping it into the hands of low-level characters just to see what happens. The orrery and its six components are presented in appendix D, and the powers of these relics are significant. But the fact that the orrery is an artifact in a some-assembly-required state gives you a lot of latitude in determining how you dole those powers out.

The orrery's components are set up so that their magic gets weird while the orrery is in pieces. At your determination, that magic might act in unpredictable ways, not recharge as often as normal, or add random effects to keep the characters on their toes. One aspect of this unpredictability comes into play in the adventure when the tiefling Talanatha uses the *timepiece of travel* to escape from the attack on Tresendar Manor, only to have the timepiece stay behind (see later on in this episode for details).

By making sure the characters understand the unpredictable nature of the components' magic, you give them good incentive to be cautious about using them. And if the power of the components threatens to derail parts of the adventure (for example, if the characters plan on using the *timepiece of travel* to teleport everywhere and find every secret location in the scenario), feel free to have the power of individual components mysteriously fail until they are all installed in the orrery housing once more.

Searching the Grounds

With the jackalwere and her pack defeated or driven off, the characters can search the grounds. If they search in the area where the jackals were digging, see "Survivor" below. If they explore the remains of the buildings on the grounds, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the following:

- Newly built wooden structures were struck by fire. Two of those still stand, but most have been burned or smashed to the ground.
- The older masonry of the manor walls had been crumbling for some time. New stonework was replacing the old, but everything has been smashed to pieces.
- Older humanoid remains were the source of the jackals' meal. However, no intact corpses can be found among the rubble.

Additionally, the walls of the still-standing structures bear a mark in chalk—a double-"D" insignia. This is the sigil of Dran Enterprises. As adventurers familiar with the operations of Acquisitions Incorporated, all the characters recognize the mark of Acq Inc's greatest rival organization. (The marks have been scribed by the archmage Hoobur Gran'Shoop, who is charged by the Six with ensuring that Dran Enterprises takes the blame for the attack on the Acq Inc franchise at Phandalin. More on Hoobur will be revealed in episode 3.)

Treasure. The two intact wooden buildings hold seven tendays' worth of rations, two explorer's packs, and a dungeoneer's pack, along with other adventuring equipment that has been smashed, burned, or melted.

Survivor

As the characters search the area where the jackals were digging, a low, pained moaning rises from beneath the rubble. Carefully pulling away the rocks reveals a half-orc buried under smashed and still-smoldering masonry. This is Gildha Duhn, majordomo of the Company of the Golden Mongoose franchise. She is starving, dehydrated, and addled. Gildha uses the **acolyte** stat block with these racial traits:

- When reduced to 0 hit points, she drops to 1 hit point instead (but can't do this again until she finishes a long rest).
- She has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet.
- She speaks Common and Orc.

Gildha repeatedly mutters something in a low voice, but she has something in her mouth that makes it impossible to understand her. Oddly, that something is a complex clockwork device, which Gildha stuck in her mouth to keep out of enemy hands during the attack. If the device is removed, the characters hear her repeatedly say, "They came for it ... they came for the timepiece ..."

If given magical healing or allowed to sleep for an hour after being given food and water, Gildha regains her senses. She tells the characters that she worked for the Acquisitions Incorporated franchise in Phandalin, and that while working on their ongoing renovation of Tresendar Manor, the franchisees were attacked at night by unknown assailants. Gildha knows few details of the attack and heard little of the aftermath. Though she saw one of her group escape by teleporting away, she isn't sure what happened to the others. Falling rubble knocked her down, then buried her. Surviving on nothing but rainwater and her half-orc endurance, Gildha has been in and out of consciousness since the attack.

Gildha Duhn

The *Timepiece of Travel*

When the characters examine the somewhat sodden device that was in Gildha's mouth, they can see that its design and etched glyphs clearly mark it as part of the *Orrery of the Wanderer.*

Gildha knows a little about the device, which she calls the *timepiece of travel.* The Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose found the relic six months ago in the possession of an evil adventuring band, who claimed to have taken it not long before from a tomb haunted by undead. After careful scrutineering and research, the Golden Mongoose adventurers learned that the timepiece had magical powers dedicated to navigation and teleportation, and speculated that it was just one piece of a larger and more potent magic device.

During the attack, Gildha saw one of the Golden Mongoose adventurers—a female tiefling paladin occultant named Talanatha Three-Coins—activate the *timepiece of travel* and teleport away. For reasons unknown, the timepiece stayed behind (see the "Level Inappropriate" sidebar). Gildha grabbed the relic, but has no idea where Talanatha went.

Gildha also tells the characters that she saw some of the attackers heading into a small cellar beneath the

manor, consisting of storage areas and a spring-fed cistern. She knows that the manor features subterranean areas more extensive than the cellar, but the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose had yet to do a thorough search of those areas. (As a result, Gildha doesn't know about the secret door that leads to the dungeon.)

Tresendar Manor Dungeon

Although the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose didn't find the secret door leading into the hidden basement beneath the manor, the agents of the Six did. They then made extensive use of the dungeon before departing. Map 2.2 shows the layout of the dungeons beneath the manor.

General Features

Except where otherwise noted, all areas of the dungeon have the following features.

Ceilings. The ceilings are 10 feet high.

Light. The dungeon is dark. Old but still functional torches and lanterns are affixed to the walls of some rooms at your determination, but they need to be lit to be useful.

Doors. Most doors in the dungeon are wooden, and are closed and unlocked. If a door is locked, it takes a successful DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to open it. A locked door can also be smashed open with a successful DC 15 Strength check.

A character looking for a secret door finds one with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

1. Cellar

The stairway leading down into the cellar shows signs of recent foot traffic. Characters can find these tracks easily. When the characters open the door at the bottom of the stairs, read:

> The door at the bottom of the stairs opens atop a set of double stairs that descend, north and south, about ten feet into a cellar. At the west end of that room, a cistern full of clear water bubbles lazily. A door on the cellar's west wall is ajar.

Cistern. Operatives of the Six tainted the cistern here. The water might appear pure, but it's teeming with a magical disease called ghoul gut. No antacid in this world or any other can beat it.

Ghoul Gut. Water polluted with ghoul parts carries ghoul gut. A creature drinking this tainted water must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or contract the disease. Symptoms strike when a victim starts a long rest or next becomes excited, as during combat. A victim suffers severe cramps, and their bowels make sounds like two ghouls fighting. When the symptoms first strike, the victim takes 5 (2d4) necrotic damage. In addition, a diseased victim regains no hit points or Hit Dice from nonmagical sources, including resting or spending Hit Dice. A victim who finishes a long rest can attempt a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the victim shakes off the disease. Failure deals the character another 5 (2d4) necrotic damage.

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check can also remove the disease from another creature. Doing so requires the character making the check to care for the sick individual during a long rest. The caregiver gains no benefit from that rest.

Secret Door. A secret door leading to area 8 is hidden in the wall in the southwest corner of the room. Agents of the Six have used this door recently. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival or Perception) check can spot the door or note scuff marks and tracks leading through it.

Walled Door. The door that leads to area 3 was walled over when the Redbrand Ruffians were ousted from the dungeons. The masonry over the doorway is obviously newer than the existing stonework, and is poorly mortared. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check confirms that something is behind the new wall. It takes 5 minutes to remove this masonry, or 1 minute if a heavy bludgeoning tool or weapon is used.

2. Storage

> Stacks of crates and casks line the walls of this storeroom.

Trap. Agents of the Six braced three flasks of alchemist's fire loosely behind the crates. Any character who searches the crates must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot the rigged flasks before moving the crates or otherwise disturbing them. If a character moves any crates before spotting the trap, the three flasks tumble in different directions, exploding in a way that covers the entire room. Each creature in the room takes 2 (1d4) fire damage at the start of each of its turns. A creature can end this damage by using its action to make a DC 10 Dexterity check to extinguish the flames.

Treasure. If the characters spot the trap, any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check can safely retrieve the three alchemist's fire flasks, disarming the trap. The crates and casks contain building supplies (nails, mortar, glue, and so forth) worth a total of 100 gp.

3. Hall with Pit

> Defaced murals and metal etchings, probably once quite beautiful, adorn this hallway. An open pit divides the passage's eastern and western ends. Hanging from nooses above the pit are two humanoid figures, each clothed in white with a purple hood pulled over its head.

Creatures. The creatures hanging here are two **scarecrows** created by the archmage Hoobur Gran'Shoop. The constructs remain motionless until the adventurers move close or attack. These scarecrows can cut the rope holding them with their claws, but they

prefer to remain hanging from their ropes while they swing to pull foes into the pit, using the following attack:

Swinging Grab. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit*: The scarecrow pulls the target 10 feet.

If a creature is pulled into the area of the pit, it must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the target falls into the pit. On a success, the target lands prone at the pit's edge.

Pit. The pit is 20 feet deep. Operatives of the Six spread shards of broken glass over the bottom of the pit, so that a creature falling in takes 2 (1d4) slashing damage in addition to 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall. Climbing the rough walls requires a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

Development. If the characters defeat the scarecrows and search the constructs, large stones can be found in each one's stuffing. Hoobur Gran'Shoop's sigil—the dragon skull pierced by a sword from the bottom up—is carved into these stones.

4. Crypt

Three smashed human-sized coffins and one intact smaller coffin lie on the floor here. The larger coffins are carved of fine mahogany and lined with rotting silk. Humanoid bones are scattered across the floor.

Creature. The smaller coffin is a **mimic** left to guard this area by agents of the Six. In its current form, this monster is indistinguishable from an object, so it surprises any group that has no means to detect it before it attacks.

Bones. When the mimic attacks, the bones spread across the floor begin to rattle and move, as if attempting to form into undead skeletons. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check sees that fine wire ties the bones to the mimic, so that when the mimic moves, the bones move too.

Treasure. One of the larger coffins has a pouch sewn into the lining under an embroidered star, which a character can find with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. The pouch detaches from the lining with any sharp tug. Inside is a *potion of gaseous form* and a *potion of frost giant strength*, kept as a means of escape for someone accidentally entombed alive.

5. Cells

The door to this area is locked. If the characters listen at it, they can hear ragged breathing. When they open the door, read:

This room reeks of filth and death. The corpse of a dragonborn rots in a rusty cell of iron bars to the north. To the south, a similar cell holds two living prisoners.

The cell doors are both locked.

Creature. Courtesy of the magic of Hoobur Gran'Shoop, the rotting dragonborn reanimates as a **ghast** moments after anyone opens the north cell. A character who quickly examines the corpse and succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices tremors coursing through the body that warn of its imminent rise. Even before it animates, the corpse registers as undead to spells and other abilities that detect such creatures.

Prisoners. The two prisoners in the south cell are the sisters Ebella and Ocheri Splintfig (N female half-elf **commoners**). When the characters enter, the Splintfigs are too weak to move, but they beg for help. Both must be given food and water before they can freely speak. If either sister takes any damage, she dies. Moreover, if the characters fail to give the sisters food and water within 10 minutes, one of them dies. The surviving sibling then makes it her life's mission to seek revenge on everyone involved, including the adventurers who failed to act quickly enough to save her sister.

The Splintfig sisters sell rare herbs and spell components, and were visiting the manor to see if the franchisees wanted any of their wares. Their choice to stay the night turned out to be a textbook case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time when the Six's operatives attacked. The Splintfigs hid during the assault, but Drahkso Blaakberz, a dragonborn mercenary and part of the assault force, found them. Drahkso took pity on the sisters and refused to kill them, so his comrades locked him up with them.

The sisters talked to Drahkso a bit, and learned he was a mercenary hired to attack the manor. He mentioned that his employer was a short, hooded person who sounded like a goblin. Eventually, some thugs came and took Drahkso away. They then returned with his corpse and tossed it back in the cell.

Treasure. Four rare platinum coins (worth 15 gp each) covered in dirt and grime can be found in the north cell, as can three glass vials hidden by Drahkso—two *potions of healing* and one *potion of animal friendship*. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check finds the treasure.

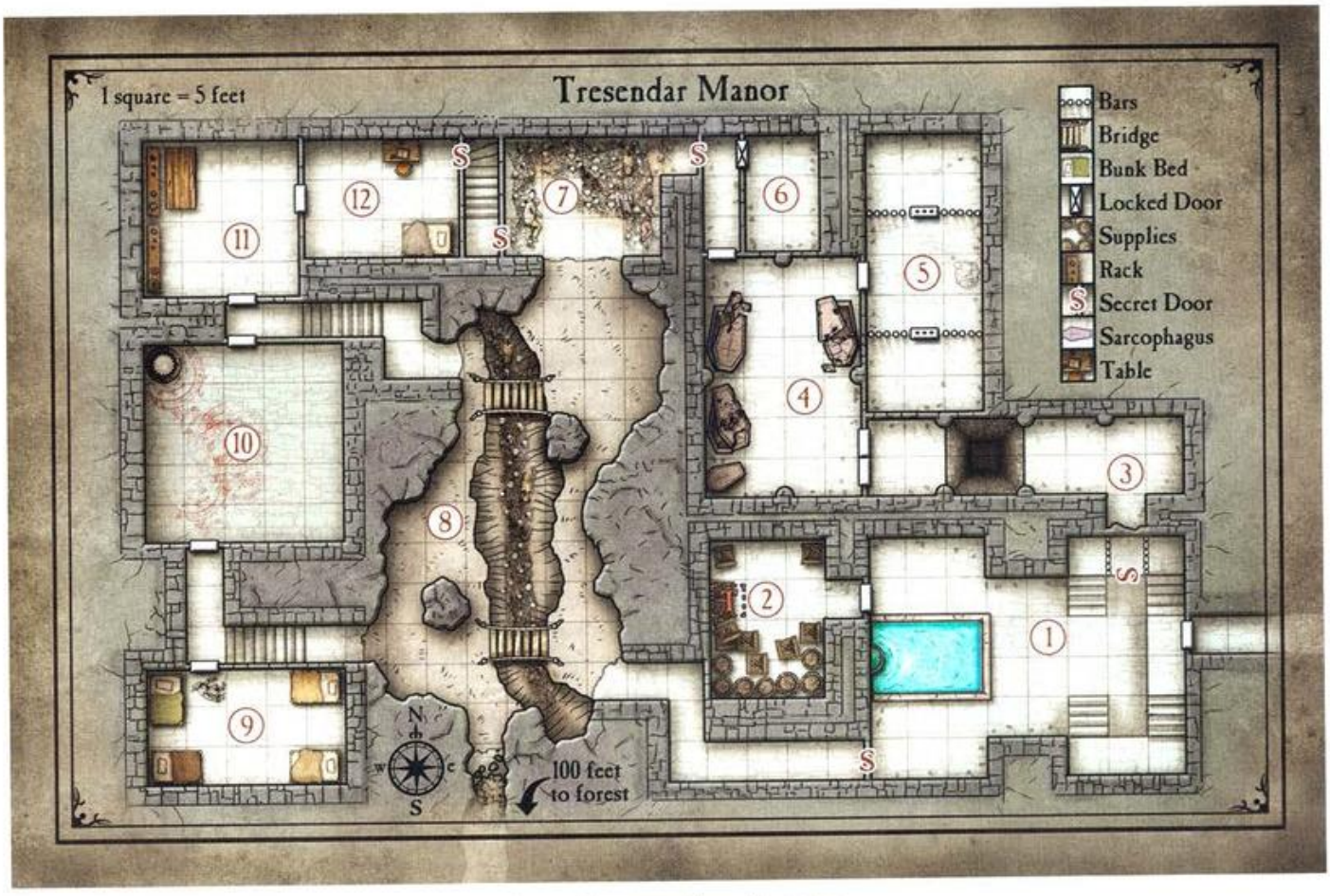
If the characters rescue both Splintfig sisters, the grateful half-elves return to Phandalin at a later date to give the party rare herbs worth 100 gp.

Franchise Opportunity. If rescued and treated well, the Splintfig sisters might become franchise business partners. As procurers of rare spell components, Ebella and Ocheri can expand their operation with suitable capital and assistance in locating and harvesting monster parts and other rare materials.

6. Empty Room

This small room is breathtakingly empty.

Sometimes, rooms are empty. Let the players' paranoia play out, though, as the characters search and ponder and fret.



Map 2.2: Tresendar Manor Dungeons

7. Failed Ritual

> A dozen desiccated and skeletal humanoid corpses litter the floor of this small chamber. The stone of the north wall has been etched with intricate runes, but the pattern ends abruptly.

Bodies and Runes. A closer examination of the still-intact bodies reveals that each bears tattoos matching the runes carved on the walls. The corpses wear a wide range of clothing and armor, but have been stripped of all valuables and gear. Some are the fallen members and staff of the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose. Others are innocent bystanders the operatives of the Six came across as they moved toward the manor from the north. Still others are Six agents who died during the attack.

A character who has proficiency in Arcana can attempt a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check when examining the corpses and sigils. With a success, the character discerns that the runes are connected to a ritual that could open a rift to the Far Realm. The dead humanoids were likely victims sacrificed to power the ritual. Something went wrong, though, and the victims were consumed before the ritual could be completed. A success with this check, or 5 minutes spent studying the runes and the bodies, gives characters advantage on their checks to work against the active rift in area 10.

Secret Doors. Both the secret doors in this room swivel open like the door in the cellar.

8. Charnel Chasm

> The smell of death is strong in what was probably once a large and ornate hall, long since fallen into ruin. Not only are the walls and supports crumbling, but a ten-foot-deep rift has opened up in the floor. Two wooden bridges span the rift, whose floor is littered with skeletal corpses.

The rift floor is difficult terrain because of the bodies. Any character who approaches the edge of the rift and succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check can hear a faint crunching sound emanating from the bodies.

Creatures. The crunching is a clue that the rift contains two **swarms of insects** feasting on the dead bodies. When any character moves near the rift or a bridge, the swarms emerge to attack.

Development. The bodies here wear a wide range of clothing and armor, and are of the same origin as the bodies in area 7. All were dumped here after being sacrificed to fuel the ritual in area 10.

Tunnel. A tunnel leads out of the rift to the south. The operatives working for the Six collapsed it intentionally, as can be determined with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check. A character

who has an engineering or mining background has advantage on this check. With three days of digging and careful reinforcement, the tunnel can be cleared again. Where it runs 100 feet to the south, the tunnel opens up to a small cave hidden in the forest outside Phandalin.

9. Between a Rock and a Cockatrice

When the characters attempt to open the door into this area, they find it locked from the inside. If they pick or smash the lock and then try to open the door, read:

> The door strikes a large piece of stone on the floor, making it difficult to push open.

Opening the Door. The stone blocking the door is a small statue—a kobold petrified by a pair of undead cockatrices that dwell here. The door can be forced open with a successful DC 10 Strength check. However, if the check succeeds by 5 or more, the door breaks, causing the character attempting the check to spill into the room and fall prone.

When the characters enter, continue with the following:

> Apart from a fallen kobold statue that blocked the door, this room contains only four beds. Each is covered in torn sheets, its straw mattress crawling with bugs.

Creatures. Two undead cockatrices lurk beneath the south beds. Each uses the **cockatrice** stat block with these changes:

- The creature is undead.
- It has immunity to the poisoned condition and to poison damage.

After the fight, a thorough examination of the undead cockatrices reveals a tiny sigil etched into each of their beaks—the draconic skull with an upthrust sword that is the symbol of Hoobur Gran'Shoop.

Development. Any character who succeeds on a DC 11 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check knows that any creature petrified by the cockatrices, including the kobold, should return to normal in 24 hours. Sure enough, half a day later, the kobold—named Patsky—revives. Patsky is hungry, thirsty, scared, and used to being bullied. No matter how the characters treat him, he tells them that he was a servant to the attackers who assaulted the manor. Those attackers brought the living (at the time) cockatrices with them, but chose to leave them behind when they moved on. A spellcaster put a mark on them (the dragon-skull symbol), then ordered Patsky to lock the creatures in this room. They pecked him before he could escape, and have been repeating the process every time the kobold recovers. At some point, the cockatrices died and reanimated, but the kobold doesn't know how.

Patsky can also tell the characters the general story of the attack. He didn't fight much, since most of the other attackers were stronger, nor does he know who hired the attackers. Hoping to learn some magic, Patsky stuck close to the spellcaster, whose name he knows as Hoobur Gran'Shoop.

Treasure. In gratitude for his rescue, Patsky offers up his only valuables—a gold necklace worth 25 gp, a *potion of resistance* (acid), and the key to this room.

Patsky's Future. Patsky is another wild-card NPC that you can use in your campaign as desired. If the characters take a liking to him, they might hire him to work for their franchise. If not, assuming anyone in the group was kind to him, Patsky might show up to help the characters with useful information at a later date. Ignored or abused, then left to his own devices, the kobold joins up with some other evil gang led by a spellcaster.

10. Far Realm Rift

When the characters enter this area, read:

> A five-foot-diameter circle of dark energy crackles in the northwest corner of this room. The walls are etched with complex runes, as well as drawings in charcoal and some reddish substance. These runes pulse with the same dark energy of the portal, surging and ebbing in a steady rhythm.

The portal crackling in the corner is a growing gate to the Far Realm, activated by operatives of the Six before they vacated this area. Characters entering the room provide the spark of energy the portal needs to bring across its first creature.

Creature. After the first character enters the room, roll initiative. A **gibbering mouther** wriggles through the portal on its initiative count, but can take no other actions on its first turn. Thereafter, the aberration tears into any other creatures in the room. Any character fighting in close notices the gibbering mouther's eyes blinking in rhythm with the runes and the portal.

Runes. The runes covering the walls keep the portal active. During combat, the characters notice these sigils continuing to pulse in sync with the portal and the gibbering mouther's blinking.

As an action, a character can attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check to deactivate the runes or a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to sabotage them. Any number of characters can attempt these checks, which can be made each round. All characters have advantage on these checks if someone succeeded on the check in area 7 or the characters examined the failed ritual there.

In each round that one or more characters succeed on the check, the gibbering mouther and the portal weaken, as follows:

- **First Success:** The gibbering mouther deals half as much damage with its attacks.
- **Second Success:** The gibbering mouther loses its Gibbering feature.
- **Third Success:** The portal closes and the gibbering mouther dies.

Development. If the portal isn't closed after 1 minute, a second gibbering mouther comes through. It suffers any consequences already in place for alterations to the runes.

11. Workshop

A long table has been pushed into the northwest corner of this room, with three corpses of male humans piled beneath it. Each corpse is naked to the waist and wearing colorful tights. Visible on the chest of one corpse is a sigil of a draconic skull pierced from the bottom by a sword.

Creatures. Hoobur Gran'Shoop's necromantic rituals have caused the humanoids slain here to come back as three **shadows**. All were professional grapplers hired by the operatives of the Six for the attack on Tresendar Manor, and were executed when the attack was done to provide permanent undead sentries. The shadows currently linger in area 12, but they move under the door into this area to attack if the characters make any noise or bring any light into the room. If the shadows attack, they surprise any character who does not notice their approach with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tactics. The shadows remember being professional grapplers, and they put on a show as they attack, tossing each other toward their enemies, "jumping" off the table or each other onto foes, and so forth. They flex and posture, pose and prance in a way that is very unbecoming of a typical undead. If they need a break from the battle, they retreat under the locked door into area 12.

Development. If the characters have Patsky or the Splintfig sisters to ask, they can report that the bodies under the table were grapplers who helped attack the manor. The last time any of the others saw the three, they were alive and among the victors.

12. Office

The door between areas 11 and 12 is locked. When the characters enter area 12, read:

A bed and a desk are the only furnishings in this surprisingly clean room. The bed is made with linen sheets and a fluffy pillow. Atop the desk are an ink pot and a quill pen.

Hoobur Gran'Shoop cleaned and set up this area as a command headquarters for the few days his forces remained in the dungeon.

Secret Messages. Crumpled up under the desk is a piece of paper covered with ink blots—residue from when the paper was placed under another piece of paper that was written upon. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check discerns the impressions on the paper, which can be read by rubbing charcoal across the page or with careful study.

S—

We have completed our work here. Omin's moppets have been defeated, although the half-orc and the tiefling escaped. We believe the former ran for the woods, which means she will be ours soon enough. The latter, we cannot locate. We could not find the timepiece either, and it is possible the tiefling took it with her. However, if its magic functions as erratically as does that of the far gear, there may be more searching to be done.

Everything goes according to plan, and the manor should be free to claim. Loose ends are being tied up as I write this.

I am, always, your obliging servant,

Hoobur

Beneath the signature is the symbol of a draconic skull pierced by a sword from the bottom up.

Clean-Up Crew

Dran Enterprises keeps a close watch on Acquisitions Incorporated operations. Whenever an Acq Inc franchise fails, Dran Enterprises swoops in to make a hostile takeover of the assets and expand its own operations. The Phandalin franchise is no exception. As soon as Sister Garaele saw the trouble at Tresendar Manor, the priest of Tymora let Dran Enterprises know. Dran Enterprises then dispatched a crew of hobgoblins to evaluate the area, clean up, and take control of Tresendar Manor as quickly as possible. When the adventurers leave the dungeon for the final time, they see that cleanup crew in any area close to the entrance.

As you step through the door, two hobgoblins pause, staring at you with a mix of anger and confusion. One wears an oversized tank on her back with a hand-held hose and nozzle emerging from it. A clear, viscous liquid drips from the nozzle, sizzling and smoking when it hits the ground. The second hobgoblin brandishes a lethal-looking sword. Both wear leather armor branded with the insignia of Dran Enterprises.

Creatures. These two **hobgoblins**—Grunka and Fraht—lead the Dran Enterprises advance crew. They arrived clandestinely just after the characters entered the dungeon, and aren't expecting any resistance given the low-key nature of their cleaning assignment. Grunka wears an acid spray gun, an invention of Dran Enterprises R&D. Add the following attack action to her stat block:

Acid Spray Gun (Recharge 5–6). The hobgoblin sprays acid in a 10-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The spray gun has a tank that can be filled with ten standard vials of acid mixed with water, allowing it to be used five times.

During the third round, two more **hobgoblins** rush to join the attack from a nearby room. One of those hobgoblins carries and will use two *spell scrolls* (see "Treasure" below).

All the hobgoblins are pragmatic professionals. If it looks like the fight is going against them, or if two hobgoblins quickly fall, the survivors ask for quarter.

Treasure. Each hobgoblin has 25 gp and a *potion of healing*. Additionally, one carries a *potion of resistance* (necrotic) and the other carries a *spell scroll* of *cause fear* and a *spell scroll* of *blindness/deafness* (if those weren't used in the fight).

The characters can also take the acid spray gun, and they find a sack holding ten vials of acid near the hobgoblins.

Development. Any NPCs the characters rescued from the dungeon or left in the ruins hide during the combat. Those characters emerge from hiding only when the situation is safe.

If questioned, any surviving hobgoblins proudly admit that they work for Dran Enterprises, and that they were hired to clean up the manor site and prepare it for annexation. The hobgoblins claim (truthfully) to know nothing about what happened to reduce the manor to ruins, or the fate of the missing tiefling from the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose. They have no connection to the Dran Enterprises insignia scribed among the manor ruins. They can't say for certain that Dran Enterprises didn't have some involvement with the incident, but if so, it had nothing to do with them.

Grunka and Frakt

Conclusion

With their adventures in Phandalin complete, the characters attain 3rd level! More importantly, after clearing the ruins and dungeon of Tresendar Manor, they are able to officially launch their own Acquisitions Incorporated franchise! The characters need to send a message to Omin Dran to report their findings. Not long after, Omin contacts them using magic, congratulating them on their success, telling them to rest up, and informing them that a representative of Acquisitions Incorporated will arrive soon to deliver paperwork and any other information a new franchise needs.

Sure enough, well-known Acquisitions Incorporated operative Viari (see appendix A) arrives the next day to deliver the documents and supplies, and to officially christen the new Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. He has each of the characters sign a contract crammed full of legalese and double-talk. Any character who reads the document and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check can decipher the jargon to learn the following, or Viari can explain the highlights:

- Franchisees pay a monthly fee to Acquisitions Incorporated to maintain their franchise.
- As part of that fee, Acquisitions Incorporated handles parts of the franchise's operations, including location procurement, staff management, and other benefits.
- The monthly fee paid to Acquisitions Incorporated by a starter franchise covers the salaries of a majordomo, a skilled hireling, and two untrained hirelings. Franchisees must pay any hirelings employed beyond this number.
- The franchise is licensed to operate in Phandalin and within 5 miles of the town, and is protected against interference in that area from other franchises.
- Acquisitions Incorporated will deal with acquiring the rights to Tresendar Manor from Harbin Wester, as they did for the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose.

"Franchise Advancement" in chapter 2 has detailed explanations of all these benefits and more.

One of the franchise's first hires might be right in front of them already. Gilda Duhn, former majordomo for the Company of the Golden Mongoose, is grieving her lost employers and anxious to put her life back together. With previous experience running a franchise (and no fault in that franchise's destruction), she makes an excellent choice for majordomo, and suggests that role for herself if the characters don't ask her. The remaining episodes in this adventure assume that the characters selected Gildha Duhn as their franchise's majordomo. If they chose another NPC to fill that role, simply adjust the text throughout the adventure accordingly.

With the contract signed, the ruins of Tresendar Manor become the franchise's starter headquarters! One of the benefits of Head Office negotiating with Harbin Wester for the lease to the manor is that the company can drive a much harder bargain than the characters would ever be able to strike. This beneficial deal might have hidden downsides, though, as the thin profit margins of the lease become a point of ongoing conflict between the characters and the corrupt banker.

Company Positions

At the signing of the franchise agreement, each character picks one of the positions detailed in "Company Positions" in chapter 2. When they do so, Viari hands out any special position gear and instructs the characters in how best to fulfill their roles. Chapter 2 has more details on these positions, the benefits they confer, and what they mean to the franchise. Hopefully, the players have already considered what positions are the best fit for their characters and for the franchise as a whole, but if not, give them time. Make sure it's clear what each position entails and what franchise duties a character with a given position is expected to perform.

In addition to the characters' positions, the franchise majordomo can also select a company position if desired. This is especially useful if there's a key position that none of the players wants to take, or if the party size is small.

Franchise Downtime

The process of rebuilding Tresendar Manor will take some time, and as proud franchise owners, the characters need to be around to pitch in and make sure nothing goes awry. At the same time, their newly awarded territory is ripe for exploration and interaction with potential customers and business partners. As the characters take stock of their situation, they can engage in downtime activities and undertake some of the franchise tasks that operate alongside the downtime rules.

All the activities mentioned in this section are introduced or talked about in the "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" section in chapter 2. That section notes which books existing activities can be found in.

New Business

As the characters spend time establishing their new commercial home turf, the explore territory downtime activity can yield up all kinds of new opportunities and connections. Interesting NPCs might be revealed on a walkabout in the woods around Phandalin, or the characters might locate stands of prime timber or abandoned mines still holding valuable ore. Such resources can become part of the franchise's ongoing revenue stream.

Commercial connections forged with NPCs could also be formalized and refined. The lizardfolk of the Mere of Dead Men and the Splintfig sisters are just two of the potential business partnerships from this episode, whether the characters engage those NPCs themselves or allocate members of their brand-new staff for those tasks.

Thinking Locally

In Phandalin, the characters might use the marketeering activity to set up a partnership with Linene Graywind at the Lionshield Coster, or with Sharna Quirstiron of the Phandalin Miner's Exchange—whether they know Sharna's true allegiances or not. Depending on how well the characters are getting along with Harbin Wester, the shady business practice activity might let them get more dirt on the banker, or gain his favor by going after some of his rivals.

Shady business practices might be an even bigger part of the characters' plans for their franchise. Any number of dodgy NPCs in town might be interested in partnering with characters who want to skirt the law. Smuggling ore without paying taxes, skimming from the coffers of either temple, running illegal gambling at the Sleeping Giant—any of these activities could net a nice profit with relatively limited risk.

Staying on the Good Side

If the characters have nobler aspirations for their franchise—or if they're savvy enough to want to hide their franchise's ignoble aspirations from the get-go—a philanthropic enterprise can go a long way toward shoring up the party's reputation. A franchise could work to support the existing charity efforts of either of the local temples, or the characters could create their own fund for out-of-work miners. Doing so makes acquiring ongoing concessions or information from townsfolk much easier, but puts the characters in the bad graces of Sharna Quirstiron at the Miner's Exchange.

Leads to the Lighthouse

Even as the characters are setting up their new franchise, you'll want to work in hooks to lead them to the next stage in the adventure. Based on what they've learned during this episode, the characters are aware that the only other survivor of the attack on the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose was the tiefling paladin occultant Talanatha Three-Coins. Clearly the best source of information regarding the attack on the manor, Talanatha used the *timepiece of travel* to teleport away, but no one knows where she went.

Many of the locals had interactions with Talanatha in the three months that the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose was around Phandalin, and characters can use the schmoozing or carousing downtime activities to learn more about the tiefling. In particular, a number of the regulars at the Sleeping Giant remember drinking with Talanatha. She often grumbled about whether the Company of the Golden Mongoose was the best fit for her, and talked about a good friend named Wizzy who worked for another Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. The details on Wizzy's franchise are vague, but Talanatha spoke of her friend having "an awesome headquarters up the coast."

Characters can also spend downtime investigating the *Orrery of the Wanderer* and the *timepiece of travel*, using either the scrutineering or research activities. In addition to revealing more details of the orrery as you see fit (see appendix D), such investigation could reveal that the last place the timepiece teleported someone to was a location on the Sea of Swords, north of Neverwinter but south of Luskan. Scrutineering or inquiries through Head Office turns up information on an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise based in that area—the Order of the Stout Half-Pint, which has its headquarters in an old lighthouse along a stretch of coast known locally as Silent Sound.

Whatever clues the characters obtain regarding Talanatha's likely destination, have those hints play out over the full length of the downtime rather than rushing

to advance to the next episode. The players should get used to how big a part downtime and franchise activities play in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign.

Continuing the Adventure

Before the next phase of the adventure, make sure the characters have their franchise and business affairs in order. They should know who their franchise employees are, giving those staff members detailed instructions about what to do while the characters are away. This sort of planning is a common theme in any Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, so establish this precedent early.

Speculating that Talanatha Three-Coins might have fled to the Silent Sound lighthouse headquarters of another Acquisitions Incorporated franchise, the characters might attempt to make contact with that franchise, either on their own or through Head Office. However, any such attempts yield no response. At some point, Omin Dran contacts the characters if they don't contact him first. He's worried about what the lack of contact with the Order of the Stout Half-Pint might mean, and he wants the characters to investigate.

The presence of Dran Enterprises operatives in Phandalin is troubling for Omin—especially if the Dran Enterprises hobgoblins were killed without the characters questioning them, leading to the assumption that the organization was behind the initial attack. If the characters aren't suitably intrigued by the orrery and its newly discovered component, that can be another thing that Omin charges them with investigating. Armed with a solid guess that Talanatha fled to the lighthouse, the characters prepare to head north!

Episode 3: Darkness at the Lighthouse

In this episode, the characters (newly enfranchised and now 3rd level) travel to the Silent Sound lighthouse to search for Talanatha, the tiefling paladin occultant of the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose. On the way, Omin Dran contacts them with a request. He wants them to stop in Neverwinter to check on a cache of Acquisitions Incorporated treasure being stored there. However, the doppelganger who hid the cache has been arrested and is about to be executed. Even if the characters save her, retrieving the treasure where it's been hidden in the House of Knowledge—Oghma's temple in Neverwinter—will take more time and effort than Omin predicted.

Leaving Neverwinter, the characters head north in the direction of Silent Sound. But even as the lighthouse comes into view, they spot a small boat under attack by creatures from the deep. If they rescue the crew, the characters might find a business opportunity that involves partaking in a little mutiny against a ruthless captain.

At the lighthouse, the characters confirm that the Acquisitions Incorporated franchise headquartered there—the Order of the Stout Half-Pint—was attacked, and that most of its members have been killed. Moving up through the different levels of the lighthouse tower, the franchisees find more and more evidence that the same spellcaster whose creations they've previously faced has wrought havoc there. That spellcaster, Hoobur Gran'Shoop, is found working in a grisly laboratory beneath the tower, to which the adventurers gain entrance through the lighthouse's magic lens. That laboratory is only part of the lighthouse's secret basement, though, and the characters engage in some dangerous and lucrative dungeoneering after dealing with—or doing a deal with—Hoobur.

With the threats in the lighthouse dispensed with, the characters learn that its franchise members had also recently collected one of the clockwork components of the *Orrery of the Wanderer*. They also have evidence in hand pointing to the involvement of Dran Enterprises in the attack on the lighthouse, building on the sighting of Dran Enterprises operatives in Phandalin. But what does Dran Enterprises want with the orrery? And which band of plucky franchisees will be tasked with finding out?

To the Lighthouse

With the franchise headquarters in Phandalin secured and the rebuilding of Tresendar Manor underway, the adventurers have a clear path ahead of them to the Silent Sound lighthouse. However, you get to decide how complicated the journey turns out to be.

One big question is whether the characters should travel overland up the Sword Coast, or whether you want to let them teleport directly to Silent Sound using the *timepiece of travel*. Either option is fine. With an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign often involving access to crazy magic, don't be afraid to let the characters make use of it. But there are options for holding back on the magic of the orrery and its components if you want to (see the "Level Inappropriate" sidebar in episode 2), and an overland journey has its own rewards, in the form of additional encounters and side treks that can help build a fun story.

This episode provides one side trek that sees the characters stop in Neverwinter on their way to the lighthouse, which can be made use of no matter what the party's method of travel. Additionally, if the characters are traveling overland, you can introduce random encounters along the road using the same method and table from episode 2. If you roll a result that makes no sense, roll again or create an encounter of your own.

A Detour to Neverwinter

Before the characters leave for the lighthouse, or while they are on the High Road traveling toward Neverwinter, Omin Dran makes contact with a "small favor." Neverwinter is located on the High Road on the way to the Silent Sound lighthouse, so is an easy stop for the party to make.

Head Office assignments of this sort can become common in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, especially as the characters' reputation as troubleshooters grows. You can use such side treks as useful support for a franchise's main mission, or as an inconvenient interruption.

Silent Sound Lighthouse

A Simple Request

Omin Dran contacts the characters via the franchise documancer's *documancy satchel* or some other form of magic. When he does, read the following to detail his request:

> "Yeah, so I'm going to need you to do a little extra work for me. It shouldn't be too taxing. I have a contact in Neverwinter who's secured a cache of treasure. Her name is Oppal DeScart, and you can usually find her in a tavern in the Blacklake District known as the Stable Quiver. She's a shapeshifter, so I can't say for sure what she'll look like when you locate her. You can suss her out with the passphrase "That's a big hen house," and she should reply with "Only to a small fox." When you locate her, tell her that it's safe to "Move the cargo along the Platinum Road." And that's it. She'll give you the treasure to get out of Neverwinter safely. The whole affair should take a few hours, and then you can be on your way. You can get the goods to me when you return."

Omin's primary concern is to have Oppal's treasure secured and removed from the city without drawing the attention of Neverwinter's tax collectors. He tells the characters that the treasure is small but its container is warded, and that they should be prepared to store and carry it without looking in it. Omin isn't keen to get into additional details, though, suggesting that the less the characters know, the better. (This is another potentially entertaining hallmark of assignments handed down from Head Office, and plausible deniability is one of the core competencies of any successful Acquisitions Incorporated franchise.)

The Backstory

Either on their way to Neverwinter or while in the city, the characters might want to dig around a bit to find out more about what exactly they're getting into. They might also assign a franchise task to their staff back in Phandalin, getting them to use scrutineering or research to find out more.

If you want to make Neverwinter a bigger part of your campaign, more information about the city can be found in the *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*. But the following information covers the basics the characters can learn regarding this side trek:

- Everything that goes on in Neverwinter is inexorably tied to Lord Dagult Neverember. After being ousted from his position as Open Lord of Waterdeep, Neverember took up the mantle of Lord Protector of Neverwinter.
- The citizens of Neverwinter accepted the rule of an autocrat who brought peace and stability to a fractious city. With the foundation of his rule solidly established, Lord Neverember cracked down on the nobility and the guilds, whom the lower classes were more than happy to blame for any problems in the city.

- Neverember has levied heavy taxes against wealthy merchants and the aristocracy. Acquisitions Incorporated maintains significant financial holdings in Neverwinter. Given the current political climate in the city, those holdings are going to be overtaxed if they are discovered.

On Omin's orders, Oppal DeScart, a **doppelganger** in the employ of Acquisitions Incorporated, has been working to move Acq Inc treasure out of Neverwinter. By consolidating caches of treasure and using them to purchase rare diamonds, she's been able to convert a great deal of wealth into portable form, ready for secure retrieval. Unfortunately for her—and unknown to Omin Dran—Oppal was recently arrested for murder in a case of mistaken identity. She's currently being held in the dungeons beneath the ruins of Castle Never, awaiting execution.

The Stable Quiver

When the characters arrive in Neverwinter, they find themselves in a city divided—quite literally. Part of the metropolis is magnificent, with breathtaking architecture, marvelous spires, and opulent decorations. And amid that beauty is a terrible scar caused by the eruption of Mount Hotenow years before. Citizens are still rebuilding from that disaster, largely thanks to the extra taxes Lord Neverember levies against the wealthy. The city's poorer residents benefit from the rebuilding work, and live in hope that the artisans and builders in the City of Skilled Hands can turn their home into the Jewel of the North once again.

The Stable Quiver is a nondescript, well-built tavern in the Blacklake District, an area that covers the northwest part of the city. The tavern boasts a mixed clientele of lesser nobles, artisans, middle-class merchants, and skilled laborers. It's a perfect meeting place for citizens engaged in activities they wish to keep out of the public eye. The low-life element normally eschews the place, except in cases where they meet with the tavern's regular patrons—who are no less criminal in many cases.

Locating Oppal. When the characters enter the tavern, all the tables are occupied, but several empty stools stand at the bar. The barkeep is Squid (N male half-elf **commoner**), so-called by the locals because of a squid-shaped birthmark on his face.

If the characters ask Squid about Oppal by name, or about any shapechangers working in the area, the half-elf initially denies knowing anything about such a person. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check notices that the barkeep is clearly concealing something. If the characters push the issue, a successful DC 10 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check causes Squid to dish up information. Any Charisma (Intimidation) check inspires him to first direct the characters toward some random character who he swears is Oppal, just to lighten the mood. He also spills if the characters offer him a bribe of 5 gp or more.

> "Afraid Oppal got herself nicked. Funny bit was, with all the laws she's broke, she gets picked up for somethin' she didn't do. Murder no less! But I'll tell you true, Oppal ain't the murderin' type.
>
> "See, Oppal was pretending to be a local orc thug, gettin' some information for a client. But in the meantime, that orc kills somebody on that very same night Oppal's pretendin' to be him. The guards know the orc, then they find Oppal lookin' like him, arrest her, and throw her in the holes under Castle Never. Even though they know she's a changer, they still blame her. Easier work for them. That's the lot of a usual suspect in Neverwinter."

If the characters can't convince Squid to talk to them, they can chat with others in the tavern. With the right motivation, another NPC can point the group in the right direction.

Interested Bystander. One of the patrons at the Stable Quiver when the characters arrive to inquire about Oppal is Moguhl Vloot. This petite human wears a nicely tailored suit and has slicked-back gray hair, even though she appears no older than thirty. Being a wererat keeps one looking young.

Moguhl works for a local thieves' guild and keeps tabs on illicit goods going into and out of the city. Her guild has brokered some of the treasure Oppal has been selling, and Moguhl's bosses want to find out where the doppelganger has been hiding the cash she's been stockpiling. With Oppal set for execution, they know they need to work fast, but are still weighing whether trying to get to her in the dungeons of Castle Never is worth the risk.

Moguhl notices the characters asking about Oppal. She tries to hide her interest, but any character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check notes her surreptitiously remaining close and listening in when the group acquires the information they need. Moguhl leaves the tavern before the characters can confront her. She slips down an alley and turns into a giant rat if anyone attempts to follow her.

Moguhl quickly gathers five **bandits** to assist her in "questioning" the characters about their knowledge of or dealings with Oppal. A short while after the characters leave the tavern, this gang challenges them, setting Moguhl up to ask who Oppal is working for and where she hid her treasure.

Naturally, the characters are unable to answer Moguhl's second question. But unless the characters also deny knowing the doppelganger's employer and are particularly convincing about their ignorance, Moguhl and her bandits attack in hopes that a good beating can convince them to tell what they know.

Moguhl uses the **wererat** stat block and wields a *+1 shortsword* she calls Piercer, which grants her a +1 bonus to her attack and damage rolls.

Moguhl flees before the adventurers can kill or capture her, using her Shapechanger trait to escape or to slip her bonds if subdued and tied up.

As my documancer, Walnut, is so fond of saying: Ignore Head Office's missives at your own peril. (She says it more like, "This is a task from Omin, so we're going to drop everything and do it TODAY!!!")

—Rosie Beestinger

Development. If the characters question the defeated bandits, the criminals admit to working for Moguhl from time to time, but they can provide no other actionable information. If Moguhl is captured and convinced to talk, she can provide intelligence on the prison beneath Castle Never, which she has been gathering in case she needs to break in to talk to Oppal.

Characters who contract lycanthropy from Moguhl might have the opportunity to get the curse removed at the Hall of Knowledge later in this episode at a reduced cost, assuming they can help the head priest there with his troubles. See the "Hall of Knowledge" section below.

Treasure. Moguhl and her bandits carry a total of 23 gp. The wererat also has a *spell scroll* of *distort value* (a new spell from chapter 3).

Moguhl's weapon Piercer is a rare magic item that requires attunement. The sword is a *+1 shortsword*, and a character attuned to the sword regains the maximum possible number of hit points from expended Hit Dice. However, the attuned character must eat twice as much food each day (a minimum of 2 pounds) to avoid exhaustion (see "The Environment" in chapter 8 of the *Player's Handbook*.)

The Holes

If the characters don't get initial information from Moguhl about the prison beneath Castle Never, they can use whatever means they choose to gather information. This might include employing appropriate backgrounds, digging into rumors spread by the criminal class, talking to city guards, and so forth.

The characters can learn the following details about the castle and the prison beneath it with appropriate roleplaying or ability checks. Easy-to-acquire information comes earlier in the list, while the details that are harder to acquire are provided later. Dispense the following points as you see fit:

- Castle Never was the historical seat of the rulers of Neverwinter. The eruption of Mount Hotenow and various attacks in the years since have reduced the structure to rubble.
- Lord Neverember has made rebuilding the castle his top priority. Much of the city's steep tax income goes to the rebuilding efforts.
- Neverwinter's worst offenders—murderers, traitors, and tax cheats—are imprisoned beneath the ruins of Castle Never. Locals call this prison "the holes." Trying to free someone from the holes is a good way to end up in them.
- Anyone in the holes has already been found guilty by Lord Neverember of high crimes, the punishment for which is death. Executions take place once each tenday, at noon. The next execution occurs two days from when the characters discover this fact.
- During executions, guards are numerous, and powerful people show up to see justice dispensed. Rescuing one of the condemned from the gallows would be a nearly impossible feat.
- Only one known entrance leads into the holes from the main level of Castle Never. That level is being rebuilt, so bricklayers, stonemasons, and untrained hirelings are common throughout. A minimum of four **guards** and three **veterans** stand watch at the entrance. Seven more **guards** and three **veterans** do the same within the holes.
- On the day before an execution, friends and family of a prisoner are allowed into the holes to bring the condemned a last meal.
- A secret passage is said to access the holes from a cave on the shore of Blacklake, from which the Blacklake District gets its name. No one the characters can talk to has seen or used this passage, which remains only a rumor.

Rescuing Oppal

The first step to rescuing Oppal is to communicate with her in some way. However, if a plan is hatched that allows the characters to message her indirectly through a third party (a bribed guard or worker, for instance), Oppal's response makes it clear that she is willing to pass along "the information" only if she is liberated. She understands that the characters' timely appearance is the only thing that stands between her and certain death.

How the characters navigate this tricky dilemma is entirely up to you. Let the players' resourcefulness and your imagination combine to create a memorable story of legendary triumph or narrow failure, followed by even narrower escapes. Ideas and plans for getting to and rescuing Oppal can cover any of the following options:

- A corrupt member of the Neverwinter city guard might help get the characters into the holes for a price. But that guard might also charge a higher and previously unmentioned price to get them out again.
- The secret entrance offers lots of possibilities, but the characters first need to find it. Then they need to deal with whatever suitable monster is currently lairing in that cave. Moreover, any number of traps, hazards, and monsters might be guarding the passage leading from the cavern to the holes.
- The characters might also try to keep things entirely legal by tracking down the orc who committed the murder Oppal is accused of. Bringing that villain in might easily clear Oppal's name—and bring the characters a certain amount of notoriety in the city. But where is that orc now? And who else might the characters need to contend with to capture him?
- Pretending to be Oppal's friends or family gives the characters easy access to the doppelganger as they bring in a last meal. Then once they're in the holes, it's up to you to decide how they might pull off a daring escape—including searching for the rumored tunnel from the inside.

Oppal's Info

If the characters rescue Oppal from the holes, she gratefully provides information on the whereabouts of Omin Dran's treasure cache, which consists of rare black diamonds mined from the rim of Mount Hotenow. The diamonds are held in a silk bag that's been placed in a false tome titled *A Layperson's Book of Common Knowledge*. Oppal hid the book in a vault beneath the Hall of Knowledge—the local temple to Oghma, god of knowledge, invention, and inspiration.

Like much of the city of Neverwinter, the Hall of Knowledge is currently under repair. Although some of the temple was damaged by the volcano, portions were spared the destruction of the lava flow, including an underground chamber called the Vault of Tomes. That undercroft contains some of the most rare and valuable books in Faerûn outside Candlekeep, and is one of the most secure locations in the city as a result. By disguising herself as an acolyte, Oppal was able to place the false tome in the vault.

On Omin's instructions, Oppal hired a wizard to place a *glyph of warding* (explosive runes) on the false book to keep it from being opened. Also on Omin's order, she doesn't know how to bypass the glyph. The doppelganger knows that Omin expected he would be able to access the diamonds once the false tome was in his possession.

Oppal knows that the vault door has a very good lock, but the door is left open whenever acolytes are moving tomes in and out of the vault (as it was when she hid the book). She also knows that the head priest (known as the grand scribe) at the Hall of Knowledge is a frail and unpleasant elf named Spivey Liethennson (LN male elf **noble**). Grand Scribe Liethennson is a strict taskmaster and does not suffer fools gladly.

Once freed, Oppal is unwilling to assist in any further capers, wanting only to get out of Neverwinter alive. No amount of threatening or cajoling can inspire her to assist the characters. She suggests that they acquire the book, seal it inside something else so as to avoid accidentally triggering the glyph, and leave the city as quickly as possible. They can deliver the goods to Omin at their leisure after that.

The Hall of Knowledge

The Hall of Knowledge is a major temple in Neverwinter, acting as a place of learning, a center of socialization, and a repository of government documentation while Castle Never is being rebuilt. Damage to the complex's outer walls and floors has already been restored, while workers now focus on interior walls and decor.

Grand Scribe Spivey Liethennson oversees the temple, ruling his limited domain with all the fervor his fragile body can muster. Acolytes and workers freeze in terror when his labored breathing warns of his approach, because he rarely has a kind word to say. Liethennson longs to leave the city and join his fellow Oghma worshipers in the serenity of Candlekeep. In the meantime, he hopes to impress church elders by running the Hall of Knowledge with an iron hand.

Curing Lycanthropy. If any characters have lycanthropy from their run-in with Moguhl Vloot, Grand Scribe Liethennson can cast *remove curse* for a donation of 50 gp. If he feels indebted to the characters (see "Alternative Entry" below), he might cast the spell for free.

Entering the Temple

Anyone can enter the temple to worship Oghma at a shrine on the first floor. Acolytes and lesser clerics are available to perform rituals for a suitable donation. The first floor also contains books and scrolls of common value, as well as public documents moved here from Castle Never. The second floor holds sleeping quarters and private work areas for staff and clergy, while the basement includes storage rooms, private shrines for generous donors, and the Vault of Tomes.

Two **veterans** in the employ of the Neverwinter city guard bar passage to the other floors at all times. The guards deny access to anyone attempting to enter the basement who is not an acolyte, known to be approved for entry, or escorted by a high-ranking priest or Grand Scribe Liethennson.

Labor Problems. The characters enter the Hall of Knowledge at an opportune time. Grand Scribe Liethennson, unhappy with the quality and the pace of the work being done, has recently taken to task the builder overseeing the renovations. Dwarf artisan Kollette Kwarter (NG female dwarf **commoner**) has finally grown tired of the elf's constant griping and badgering.

At any opportune moment as the characters are within or approaching the temple, they see Kwarter drop her tools at Liethennson's feet, make a rude gesture in his direction, and call on her workers to leave. She knows that she and her team can find easier work for more money elsewhere in the city. Quick-thinking characters can seize this opportunity to pretend to be masons, carpenters, or other craftspeople to gain access to the basement level. This doesn't grant characters access to the Vault of Tomes, but it gets them close.

Alternative Entry

Characters wanting access to the basement might attempt Charisma (Deception) or Dexterity (Stealth) checks to connive or sneak their way into the area. By pretending to be wealthy donors to the temple, they could also reach the basement with a donation of 20 gp for the party. Give any plan that makes sense a chance to succeed.

Trouble in the Basement. If the players prefer action, an emergency in the temple could assist them in their quest. An eldritch tome stored in the vault has its dweomer suddenly fail, unleashing a burst of arcane energy that animates two statues in the vault. As the characters case the temple, screams and shouts are heard as the statues run amok. The two veterans on guard step up, only to quickly fall victim to the animated statues. The characters can use the distraction to slip into the vault while scribes and acolytes flee, or they can deal with the threat to earn the favor of Grand Scribe Liethennson.

Each of the animated statues uses the **gargoyle** stat block.

Entering the Vault of Tomes

Even after the characters have accessed the basement, entering the Vault of Tomes while it's locked down is a challenge. The door to the vault employs a complex three-stage lock, requiring three successful DC 20 Dexterity checks using thieves' tools to open. If the characters take too long to open the lock, staff or clergy might notice them, alerting any veterans on watch.

If the characters defeated the statues, they have the thanks of Grand Scribe Liethennson. He is reluctant to allow anyone other than worshipers of Oghma into the Vault of Tomes, but characters with his favor have an easy time convincing him of their need to do obscure research or similar claims.

Books within the vault are indexed and arranged alphabetically by title. Characters can find *A Layperson's Guide to Common Knowledge* with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Leaving Neverwinter

With the diamonds secured, the characters can leave the city with little problem. Provided they don't wave the diamonds under the noses of the guards while departing, they aren't bothered or taxed. If they report back to Omin with magic, he instructs the franchise's hoardsperson or another suitable character to keep the diamonds safe until delivery.

If the characters dispel or otherwise deal with the *glyph of warding* and open the book, it contains a silk bag with twelve black diamonds inside. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check from any character with a merchant, jeweler, or mining background can assess the value of the gems. A character with experience as a jeweler has advantage on this check.

A successful check determines that while four of the gems are real diamonds (5,000 gp each), eight are actually finely cut smoky quartz (10 gp each). Omin knows that Oppal mixed the fakes with the real diamonds to throw off would-be thieves, allowing her to offer them the quartz while she used legerdemain to retain the valuable ones. Characters who don't know this might sweat a bit as they try to figure out how to explain the situation to Omin.

The *Tortured Tortle* Mutiny

The Silent Sound lighthouse sits atop a cliff three days' travel north of Neverwinter, and acts as a navigation beacon to ships traveling up and down the Sword Coast. The shoreline of this often-foggy area gives way to underwater rocks, posing a dire threat to ships. More information on the lighthouse and the fate of its franchise can be found as the characters explore in the "Silent Sound Lighthouse" section below. But before the characters have a chance to explore, they find themselves distracted by disaster on the approach to the lighthouse.

Sailors in Need

Whether they're traveling by land, arriving by boat, or teleporting in, the characters witness a disturbing scene as they first catch sight of the lighthouse.

> Silent Sound lighthouse finally comes into view, rising atop a rough and dangerous-looking promontory of rock that thrusts up from the beach behind it and juts into the Sea of Swords. If the lighthouse is supposed to act as a beacon, though, something is seriously wrong. Its top is hazy and indistinct, as if a fog was obscuring the lantern room. Also, for a place that's an occupied headquarters, there's a lot of scaffolding along the tower's base, and three large tents are pitched on the slope of the beach behind the lighthouse promontory.
>
> Wind and the crashing of waves against the cliffs is loud, but even over that, panicked shouts can be heard. Along the shore next to the beach, tentacles rising from the sea thrash out against a longboat. Three people in the boat are fighting off the tentacles, and are faring poorly.

Creatures. Three **giant octopuses** are attacking a longboat and its crew—Belle Mare, Menard Chatte, and Chalkie Sharke (all CG human **bandits**). Adjust the fight to the length of time it'll take the characters to reach the scene, depending on how they're traveling. But if they tarry for no particular reason, Menard is dragged into the water, never to surface again. A similar period later, a tentacle pulls Chalkie into the drink. Belle then perishes if the characters ignore the fight completely.

Shore Fight. The crew is aboard a 15-foot longboat with a sail. The fight takes place 15 feet off shore, where the water is 10 feet deep. The first 10 feet of the shoreline is difficult terrain because of the waves.

If the characters intercede, the sailors fight alongside them until the octopuses are driven away, or the characters convince the sailors to flee to safety.

Development. The three sailors are from a caravel called the *Tortured Tortle*, presently anchored a mile off shore. Belle is the first mate, and voices her appreciation for the characters' rescue. If they seem like honorable sorts, Belle takes a risk and further asks them for assistance. She admits that she and her crew are smugglers coming ashore to take possession of goods in a nearby sea cave (see the "Treasure" section). But she and the others are at their wits' end in terms of how to deal with the *Tortured Tortle*'s captain, a hard old salt named Athgar Friedson.

Trouble at Sea

Friedson is a Northlander who has pushed his crew to more and more dangerous and despicable deeds in recent months. He has even talked about taking up full-on piracy and slave trading to earn extra coin, and the (mostly) good souls aboard the *Tortured Tortle* are looking for a new way to make a living. However, Captain Athgar and his new associate, a cleric of Umberlee called Sister Foam, have threatened to kill any crew members "not brave enough" to take on these new and terrible pursuits.

> Like all living things, your franchise needs to be willing to abase itself for coin. Play to your strengths by having law-abiding franchisees stop crimes, while the more chaotic ones commit them.
>
> —K'thriss Drow'b

If the characters care to help, they can challenge Captain Athgar. The (mostly) good members of the crew can handle the bad apples backing Athgar. Certainly, with such aid, the adventurers can handle the captain and his priest! Belle promises that if the characters help, they can have a stake in the *Tortured Tortle*, with her as the new captain. She expresses her willingness to work out any business arrangements for the future.

Regardless of the characters' decision, Belle also reveals that she knows something is wrong at the Silent Sound lighthouse. For at least two tendays, the normally reliable light has been dark. She fears that some sort of magic is in play, because it isn't just the case that the light is out. Rather, it appears to radiate some kind of dark energy. Moreover, she's heard that sightings of spectral figures and will-o'-wisps in the area are on the rise.

In the end, the sailors must return to their ship or risk the captain's wrath against their friends. The characters are left to explore the lighthouse on their own.

Treasure. The smugglers came ashore to retrieve several bolts of rare Calimshan silk to take to an interested buyer in the Moonshae Isles. The five bolts are worth 100 gp each. The characters might find this loot in a nearby sea cave, along with lots of mundane supplies, if all the smugglers perish. Otherwise, Belle recovers the silk before going back to the *Tortured Tortle*, but offers the characters 30 gp from her own purse in thanks for their help.

Mutineers

If the characters agree to help Belle oust Captain Athgar, she suggests that they accompany her back to the *Tortured Tortle*. She plans to tell the captain she picked up new crew members and to invite the characters on board, at which point they can attack the captain and the priest. As planned, Belle will lead the rest of the crew against those who side with the captain. It should all be over quickly.

The trip back to the *Tortured Tortle* is smooth, and the longboat sails into position to be hoisted aboard. Belle yells to the watch that she has new crew to bring aboard, and the watch acknowledges the request. This exchange brings the captain—a tall and muscular Northlander—onto the deck. Standing at his side is a short, stocky human female wearing a holy symbol of Umberlee around her neck.

Creatures. Captain Athgar (NE male human **veteran**) is as mean as the ocean is deep. The devotee of Umberlee is called Sister Foam (NE female human **priest**), and she's a good match for the captain in demeanor and ferocity. The captain berates Belle for bringing back useless chum such as the characters, and demands that they leave his ship immediately—without the use of the boat. If the characters try to reason with him, the captain quickly proves how unreasonable he can be by ordering the crew to kill the characters and dump their corpses overboard.

Chaos of Battle. As soon as the characters attack, Athgar and Sister Foam order the crew to defend the ship. In the first round of combat, two sailors (N human **bandits**) attack the characters alongside the captain and priest. By the start of the second round, Belle convinces other sailors to take up arms against those loyal to Athgar. None of the sailors attack the characters thereafter.

As the battle continues, you can decide how the rest of the combat goes with regards to additional help. If the characters are winning handily, a few loyalists might escape the general melee and fight beside Captain Athgar. If the characters fare poorly, Belle or other mutineers could intervene to relieve some of the pressure.

Treasure. If the characters assist Belle Mare in carrying out a successful mutiny, she rewards them with a red pearl worth 200 gp, as well as a yellow diamond *elemental gem*. Both belonged to the captain. She then asks the crew to transport the characters back to shore so they can continue their mission.

A lot of people think of piracy as a dead-end job or a last-resort career. This is remarkably shortsighted, as the gig has a startling number of upsides. For example, it's a job that allows you to wear a lot of scarves and sashes. That's rare. What's more, you're never more than two steps from some sort of convenient rope that you can cut and use to dramatically swing into danger.

What's more, people don't realize that profit-sharing arrangements are surprisingly common, and there are great opportunities for internal promotion of the dead-sailor's-boots variety. Also? There are a lot of dead sailor's boots, and the resale on those can be very high. Good boots are scarce.

—Viari

Silent Sound Lighthouse

Silent Sound lighthouse is a seventy-foot-tall cylindrical tower of mortared stone, with a square base carved into the rock it stands on. The lantern room is enclosed within glass walls and features an open-air catwalk. Map 3.1 shows the layout of the lighthouse tower, which is reached by way of a twisting but safe path leading up from the beach behind it.

Free Sailing Ship! Or Is It ... ?

If the characters make a deal with Belle Mare and succeed in taking the *Tortured Tortle*, how they benefit is up to you. Before you decide to allow the *Tortured Tortle* and its crew to work for the franchise, think through the potential ramifications, and how you could use them later in your campaign. Like other deals, this one has potential benefits and possible drawbacks. Even if the crew of the *Tortured Tortle* pledges loyalty to the characters and swears off (most) of their illegal activities, much could go wrong.

Perhaps the ship is in sad shape after years of neglect. Can the characters spare 1,000 gp (a tenth of the sailing ship's worth) for repairs? And what happens if the ship gets into trouble and the characters are constantly called upon to rescue the crew and protect their investment?

Authorities across the Sword Coast might also want to arrest the crew for Captain Athgar's misdeeds. If any crew members are caught, the authorities might learn about the ship's business relationship with the franchise, creating potential trouble for the characters.

Map 3.1: Silent Sound Lighthouse

The Order of the Stout Half-Pint had been using the lighthouse as its headquarters for two years before that franchise suffered a fate similar to the Fellowship of the Golden Mongoose. It was six months ago that the order came into possession of a piece of the *Orrery of the Wanderer* called the *rotor of return*, and just over a month ago that their search for lore on the rotor came to the attention of the Six. The Six's attack on the lighthouse actually preceded the attack on Phandalin by a few days, and was similarly headed by archmage Hoobur Gran'Shoop. (As a successful franchise, the Order of the Stout Half-Pint has some slack with Head Office, so that their last missed franchise payment didn't draw the same immediate attention as the missed payment from the Phandalin franchise.)

As with the *timepiece of travel*, Hoobur has so far failed to find the *rotor of return*, but he doesn't mind. He has claimed the lighthouse since returning here from Phandalin, finding the basement laboratory to be a perfect place for his experiments. Even as he works for the Six, Hoobur continues to make it look as if he works for Dran Enterprises. The leadership of the Six expects that attacks on two Acquisitions Incorporated franchises will attract the attention of Acq Inc Head Office, and Splugoth the Returned wants that attention directed elsewhere while his plan to claim the orrery comes together.

Beachside Tents

On the beach behind the lighthouse, three large tents are set up as temporary lodgings. The members of the Order of the Stout Half-Pint and their staff were living here while preparing the lighthouse for a new round of franchise renovations. Evidence of a fight from many days ago is spread across the grounds, including slashed canvas and broken weapons. Mundane furniture and gear fills the tents, along with kegs of ale, casks of fresh water, boxes of rations, and bundles of arrows. All the tents feature the Dran Enterprises logo scrawled onto them in chalk.

Treasure. In one tent, a locked chest hidden within a provision crate holds some of the treasure of the Order of the Stout Half-Pint. Hoobur Gran'Shoop had his undead servants search the tents, but they weren't savvy enough to spot the chest, which requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check to find. A successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools opens the chest. Smashing the chest open requires a successful DC 10 Strength check, but doing so breaks 1d4 of the potions within. The chest contains 500 sp, gems worth 250 gp, three *potions of healing*, and a *potion of heroism*.

General Features

The lighthouse is old, and the Order of the Stout Half-Pint has been undertaking recurring renovations since they moved in two years ago. Except where otherwise noted, all areas of the lighthouse have the following features.

Ceilings. Ceilings are 15 feet high and flat.

Light. The lighthouse is mostly dark. Two lanterns full of oil hang within each level on the east and west walls. Window slits stand 3 feet above the floor on each level, at the center of the north and south walls. These slits are 3 feet high but only a few inches wide, so they're too small to allow passage or let much more than a little dim light in.

Resting at the Lighthouse. If the characters attempt a long rest anywhere inside or within sight of the lighthouse, an undead patrol of two **ghouls** and four **zombies** interrupts them. A new patrol passes every 6 hours, making finishing a long rest impossible unless the characters leave the area.

Front Door

The door leading into the ground floor at the base of the lighthouse is both locked and trapped.

Fusillade Trap. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the lock of the stone door is connected to wires that run into the tower's stone walls. This custom-built franchise defense system is rigged to release a rain of arrows from turrets up higher on the lighthouse. The trap can be bypassed by pressing a hidden button on the door, requiring a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to find. Or it can be disarmed with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. If the check to disarm fails by 5 or more, the trap is triggered.

If the trap is activated, each creature within 10 feet of the door must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) piercing damage from the rain of arrows on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The trap does not reset itself automatically, but it will be restocked with arrows and reset manually by Hoobur Gran'Shoop's undead minions if the characters are away from the lighthouse for more than a few hours.

Once the trap is disabled or triggered, the lock on the door can be picked with a successful DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. The sturdy stone door can also be smashed open with a successful DC 20 Strength check, or it can be battered down (AC 13, 50 hit points, immunity to poison and psychic damage).

Ground Floor

When the characters gain access to the ground floor, they can see what's inside.

> In the center of this square room carved into the base of the promontory, a circular staircase spirals upward. The area has been emptied of furniture, but a number of parchments and maps are tacked onto the walls. The corpse of a halfling is sprawled beneath one of those maps. It isn't moving. However, the spectral halfling hanging motionless in the air above it is very much in motion as it drifts toward you, moaning.

Creature. The **ghost** of one of the members of the Order of the Stout Half-Pint (see below) now guards this area, attacking as soon as any character steps into the room or 1 round after the door is opened.

Development. The ghost and the corpse are all that remain of a deceased member of the Order of the Stout Half-Pint, Patsy McRoyne. An examination of the body reveals no weapon wounds, but a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Medicine) check finds evidence of necrotic damage. A familiar sigil has been carved into the corpse's chest—a draconic skull pierced by a sword thrust upward through it.

The maps and parchments tacked up along the walls include the following:

- A number of maps show trade routes in the area around the lighthouse, running all the way to Luskan to the north. Among the handwritten marginalia on one map are the words "Dran Ent. secret HQ in Luskan? Threat?" with a circle around that city.
- One parchment is the franchise contract between Acquisitions Incorporated and the Order of the Stout Half-Pint. The franchise was established two years ago, and has been doing well by all accounts.
- A wall calendar with the name "Wizzy" on it records adventures the order has undertaken. It also notes intended headquarters renovations that are con-

stantly behind schedule, given how much time the franchise members spend away from the lighthouse adventuring. One of those adventures was a raid on an old tomb six months ago, where they cleared out numerous monsters and found something noted as a "magic clock."

Second Floor

The next floor is circular, as the square base cut into the promontory gives way to the upper levels of the tower. The stairway continues its upward spiral from this floor to another. Building implements, tools, and boards line the walls. Three tall wardrobes and four large chests stand among these materials.

Creatures. Hiding in the wardrobes and chests are four **ghouls** made from gnome and halfling corpses of members of the Order of the Stout Half-Pint. The diminutive undead burst out to attack when any creature enters this area, surprising anyone who does not succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. If any ghoul attacks an elf and notes its immunity to ghoul paralysis, all the ghouls avoid that target thereafter.

Treasure. In one of the chests that a ghoul emerged from, the characters find eleven pieces of black jasper worth 10 gp each. In the pockets of a cloak hanging in one of the wardrobes are a *potion of frost giant strength* and ten *+2 sling bullets*.

Third Floor

As you step from the stairs into the single room of this floor, a snarling and growling greets you. On opposite sides of this room stand two vicious-looking hounds with black fur. The creatures smell of sulfur and rot, and both wear ornate collars of silvery metal. Each stands within a square scribed onto the floor, ten feet on a side and edged with runes. The rune-marked boundaries appear to push the creatures back as they try in vain to cross through.

Creatures. Two **hell hounds** are presently held within magical wards in this area. Hoobur summoned these fiends but has yet to assign them a task, so he keeps them "crated" here. The hell hounds can't leave the rune-bounded areas unless the runes are disturbed (including by a character who enters the warded area), or if the characters activate the runes on the stairs (see "Trapped Stairs" below). The hell hounds can, however, breathe fire on anyone who gets close enough to them.

Wards. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check made to investigate the wards understands the purpose of the runes, as well as the ways in which the wards can fail (see below).

Trapped Stairs. Runes scribed onto the six bottom stairs leading up to the next level are linked to the runes holding the hell hounds in place. The stair runes can be noted with a *detect magic* spell or similar effect, or a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check.

A character who is aware of the runes and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check discerns that anyone who steps on the trapped stairs releases the hell hounds from the warded areas. Unless the hell hounds are first destroyed, the only way to safely climb the stairs is to disarm the runes with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Failure by 5 or more triggers the runes, releasing the hell hounds. *Dispel magic* can remove the runes from one stair.

It takes a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb the stairwell walls and avoid the stairs. Jumping over all the warded stairs in the curved stairwell requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. Failure on any of these checks sets off the runes. If one or more stairs are deactivated with *dispel magic* first, a character climbing or jumping up has advantage on the check.

Treasure. Each hell hound wears an ornate platinum collar, one etched with the name "Wilbur" and the other with "Wilhelmina." Each collar is worth 50 gp.

Fourth Floor

The circular staircase ends on this floor in a room that contains vibrant decor despite its sparse furnishings—a bed, a dresser, a desk, and a glass tank. Bright paint in a rainbow of colors is splashed on the walls in something that might be a pattern. Garish rugs and tapestries cover the floor and walls. Costume gemstones adorn almost every surface that can contain them.

A set of rungs on the south wall gives access to a hatch in the high ceiling. The hatch presumably provides access to the top of the lighthouse and the lantern room.

Resting in the glass tank among wilting plants and countless dead insects is a multicolored **spider** called Rainbow. Rainbow is the familiar of Wizzy Fotz, the gnome wizard who led the Order of the Stout Half-Pint. Rainbow is a dour and dark creature, despite (or because of) its former master having magically painted the spider in rainbow hues.

If the characters find a way to communicate with Rainbow, it speaks in a droll and erudite accent, laced with casual profanity and dripping with sarcasm. If it can't speak with the characters, Rainbow can spin a web to create words, but these are equally derogatory, bitter, and profanity laced. In either case, the spider can pass along the following information:

- Rainbow has been Wizzy's familiar for as long as it can remember. That excruciating and annoying existence could be matched only by a stint in the Nine Hells according to the spider (which claims to have been there once).
- The Order of the Stout Half-Pint was a successful adventuring franchise made up only of gnomes and

halflings. Its members had gained enough prestige and capital to acquire the lighthouse, which undergoes an endless spate of renovations.

- A weird gnome named Hoobur approached the group a month ago, asking to join them. When the members of the order let their guard down, the new gnome called forth a horde of undead creatures that slaughtered everyone.
- Since then, Rainbow has remained in this area. The spider can feel that its master is not dead, but is also not truly alive. Rainbow believes Wizzy persists in some sort of half-life at the hands of the gnome archmage.
- A tiefling unexpectedly teleported into the lighthouse a few days after the order had been wiped out. She was spotted by Hoobur's undead minions and captured. Rainbow doesn't know what happened to her after that.

Development. Rainbow knows that the lantern room at the top of the lighthouse allows people to teleport to the secret basement beneath the tower. However, it shares that information only with characters who agree to search for and save Wizzy. Or put the mage out of his half-dead misery. (The spider isn't choosy; it just wants some closure.) Rainbow does not know the current passphrase to activate the teleporting power of the lighthouse lens.

Treasure. Rainbow's glass terrarium is full of dirt, plants, insects, and webs. It also contains the *rotor of return*, buried beneath the dirt in the tank. Rainbow knows the rotor is there but reveals its presence only if Wizzy is dead and the characters haven't found the object on their own. A character who searches the tank and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check finds the rotor. If it is taken before Wizzy is confirmed dead, Rainbow is sullen but makes no argument.

Lighthouse Top

The hatch in the ceiling of the fourth floor provides access to the top of the lighthouse. Magical shadow causes this area to be lightly obscured. When the characters arrive, read:

> This area is gloomy and dancing with shadows. A ten-foot-wide catwalk encircles the fifteen-foot-high lantern room housing the lighthouse's crystal lens. The lens rotates lazily, but rather than shedding light, it emanates an aura of cold shadow. The walls of the lantern room are five-foot-wide panels of glass set with a single glass door.

Creatures. Hoobur has entrusted the protection of the necromantic lens to a **will-o'-wisp** and three **shadows**. The shadows resemble halflings and gnomes, former members of the Order of the Stout Half-Pint. These undead remain hidden until the second character gains access to the balcony, at which point they attack. The creatures retreat into the lantern room if necessary (with the shadows slipping through a gap beneath the door), knowing the characters can't enter without some effort (see "Glass Door" below).

Catwalk. A 10-foot-wide stone catwalk set with a low railing encircles the lantern chamber housing the necromantic lens. A character who falls from the catwalk can grab onto the railing with a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw.

Glass Door. The glass door that provides access to the lantern room is magically locked, and all the glass making up the door and wall is magically reinforced. The lock can be opened with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check or Dexterity check using thieves' tools. A character can also shatter a panel or the door with a successful DC 20 Strength check, or can bash through it. The door and each glass panel has AC 18, 30 hit points, and is immune to cold, necrotic, poison, psychic, and radiant damage.

Necromantic Lens. Hoobur Gran'Shoop has scribed the magic lens atop the lighthouse with faint runes that cause it to radiate necromantic energy. In addition to filling the area with shadow, the lens grants any undead creature at the top of the lighthouse the following benefits:

- It has advantage on saving throws.
- It has resistance to radiant damage.
- The undead regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Light 'Em Up. Any character who witnesses the effects the lens's shadow has on the undead can attempt a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check to assess the lens's magic. With a success, the character understands the properties of the shadow and intuits that a powerful necromantic ritual has transformed the lens.

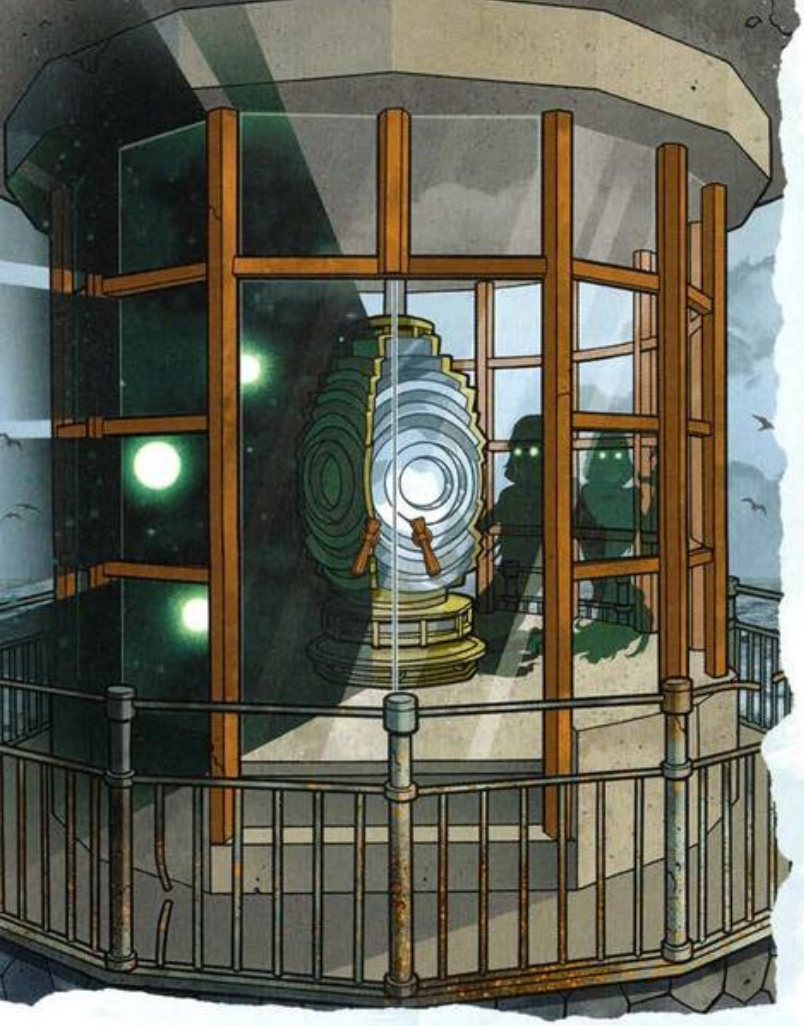
Once the lens's power has been determined, any character can reverse part of the corrupting ritual with any of the following actions:

- A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check disrupts the flow of necromantic energy within the lens.
- A successful DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check subtly sabotages the runes scribed into the lens.
- A character can expend one use of Channel Divinity to force divine power into the lens.

For each successful action undertaken to disrupt the lens, its power falters as follows:

- The area around the top of the lighthouse is no longer lightly obscured.
- The lens no longer grants benefits to undead.
- The energy of the lens is reversed for 1 minute, shining out as bright light that fills all exterior areas of the lighthouse within 20 feet. While the energy is reversed, each undead creature that starts its turn in this area takes 11 (2d10) radiant damage. Each creature that isn't a construct or undead regains 11 (2d10) hit points at the start of its turn. A creature that could regain hit points but has died within the last minute returns to life with 1 hit point. (This includes any creatures that have fallen from the lighthouse.)

Arms and Armaments. The arrows that fuel the fusillade trap seen at the entrance to the lighthouse



are restocked in magazines set under the outside edge of the catwalk. This will likely only be important if the characters decide to take over the lighthouse (see "Franchise Downtime" at the end of this episode). But if the trap wasn't triggered, you might also decide that a character who slips from the catwalk and manages to hang on to the railing can redirect one of the magazines toward any threats. Each creature in a 15-foot cone directly in front of the magazine must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (3d6) piercing damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

Development. If the characters learned about the lantern's teleporting qualities from Rainbow on the fourth floor, it's a simple matter to figure out how the lens works. If they didn't learn that information, they can note that the lens continues to pulse with magic even after its necromantic corruption is expunged. An *identify* spell, or a few minutes of study by a character with proficiency in Arcana or who uses *detect magic*, reveals not only evocation magic within the lens (used to produce the magical light), but conjuration magic tied to teleportation.

Speaking a command phrase and stepping into the lens teleports a creature to a fixed destination somewhere nearby. The command phrase can be ascertained from the runes newly carved into the lens with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check. (The passphrase is automatically learned if the lens was initially assessed with *identify*. Undead creatures can activate the teleportation power of the lens simply by stepping into it.) A character who speaks the command phrase "Hoobur Osto Draco" and steps toward the lens is teleported into the secret basement beneath the lighthouse. In that basement, Hoobur Gran'Shoop conducts his dark experiments.

(If the characters came up unlucky in gaining information from Rainbow and have no inclination to further investigate the lens, have an undead patrol of four **zombies** step suddenly out of the lens after the fight but before the characters leave this area. Anyone who sees the zombies appear recognizes that the magic lens is the teleportation portal that brought them forth.)

Secret Basement

The original builder of the lighthouse was a kindly old wizard who enjoyed the romantic idea of living rustic by the sea in his final years. He wanted a laboratory inaccessible to the prying eyes and wandering feet of normal folk. He therefore created the magic lens that allowed him to teleport directly from the top of the lighthouse to his underground workshop.

When the Order of the Stout Half-Pint took over the abandoned lighthouse two years ago, Wizzy quickly discovered the teleporting power of the lens. However, renovating the disused basement laboratory had long remained just another item on the franchise's to-do list, and no one ever discovered the super-secret basement beyond.

After Hoobur Gran'Shoop led his undead minions in the attack on the lighthouse, the gnome archmage used the teleporting lens to inspect the secret basement laboratory, and soon discovered the super-secret basement beyond. Though he didn't explore the super-secret basement, he was delighted to find that most of the equipment he needed to do his work (minus the victims) was already set up for him in the lab. The place was even dark and dreary, just the way he liked it. Not wanting to pass up an incredible opportunity, the archmage decided to make the Silent Sound lighthouse his new home.

During his attack on the lighthouse, Hoobur made sure that his troops captured rather than killed Wizzy Fotz, the gnome leader of the Order of the Stout Half-Pint. When the tiefling Talanatha appeared out of nowhere in her flight from the attack on Tresendar Manor, Hoobur's minions took her alive as well. He later brought these two prisoners to his lab and has been performing magical rites on them, draining their vitality and will to keep them in a state between life and death.

Map 3.2 shows the layout of the lighthouse secret basement and the super-secret basement beyond.

Arrival

When the characters teleport into Hoobur's lab, read or paraphrase the following:

DARREN M. A. CALVERT

A blinding flash leaves an indelible mark in your brain as you step into the lens. When your vision clears, you find yourselves in the corner of a stone chamber filled with laboratory and arcane equipment. Tall bookcases filled with tomes line two walls, while the other walls feature long tables covered with alembics, flasks, cauldrons, beakers, and containers holding weird reagents and components. An iron cage is set against one wall, its door open.

Two more tables surrounded by chairs stand in the center of the room. The first contains a variety of humanoid body parts, all on the small side. The second table holds a tiefling restrained with leather straps. She struggles against the bonds with a wild look on her face.

Standing near the tiefling's table is an odd-looking construct with an even more oddly placed spigot at the base of its barrel-shaped body. A gnome dressed in garishly colorful clothes sits on a stool nearby, his eyes blank. Another gnome sits next to the first, but this one is most lively and chipper. He wears dark robes and a red fez bearing the Dran Enterprises logo—apparently scrawled in white chalk.

"See Wizzy?" the chipper gnome says to the other. "I told you we would have visitors. I felt their presence in the lantern room." He sips from a cup of tea as he beckons to you. "Would you like to have a seat? And can I get you some chamomile tea? My name is Hoobur Gran'Shoop, by the way. Pleased to meet you."

Creatures. Hoobur Gran'Shoop (LE gnome **archmage**) depends on a **keg robot** (see appendix B) to defend him. (The construct was originally a servant of the lighthouse franchise.) Wizzy (NG male gnome **mage**) is also under Hoobur's power, and acts as the archmage's unwitting ally. In his current state, Wizzy can cast only cantrips, 1st-level spells, and 2nd-level spells.

The tiefling—Talanatha Three-Coins from Phandalin—is alive for now. But if the characters fail to act quickly, she transforms into a **vampire spawn** also under Hoobur's control (see below).

To Fight or Not to Fight?

Hoobur Gran'Shoop is a far more powerful foe than the characters can handle at their current level. Fortunately, he doesn't want to kill them. In fact, the archmage is a big fan of the plucky, can-do attitude that's brought them this far. He was hired—and given a great deal of magic and money—by the Six to wipe out a couple of Acquisitions Incorporated franchises, here and at Tresendar Manor. His instructions were to make it look like Dran Enterprises was responsible. Other than that, he has no dog in this fight.

Hoobur attempts to establish a sincere dialogue with the characters, chatting about the serenity of the area surrounding the lighthouse, the importance of good friends, the relaxing qualities of a good cup of tea, or any other topic that catches his fancy. During the conversation, he drops as many references to Dran Enterprises as possible, implying that the organization is the characters' true enemy. He reinforces any rumors the characters have heard about Dran Enterprises, or spins those rumors if they haven't. This includes the speculation seen on the map on the lighthouse first floor that Dran Enterprises has a secret headquarters—and thus a sinister presence—in Luskan.

Hoobur as a Recurring NPC

Hoobur Gran'Shoop, gnome archmage, is thoroughly evil, and most likely a few phalanges short of a hand. But just because a gnome is a tiny bit on the dark side doesn't mean he can't be a useful ally! Make note of the terms on which the characters part ways with Hoobur, whether they leave him in control of the lighthouse or throw down against him. The archmage could turn up later in the campaign with an interesting business proposition, or might work with the characters in an "enemy of my enemy is my friend" scenario. Alternatively, if Hoobur was forced to flee, he might decide that the franchisees are a threat to his livelihood and reputation that need to be eliminated.

Hoobur Gran'Shoop

Necromancy as a business model needs more discussion, I think. Who hasn't had that fantasy about having all undead employees? No? Just me? Okay.

—Omin Dran

When the talk becomes serious, Hoobur tells the characters he's willing to let them walk away right now, taking Wizzy and Talanatha with them, if they leave him to his work here. The laboratory is such a great space, and the archmage is making incredible strides in understanding the thin veil between the worlds of the living and the dead.

If the characters are quick to accept Hoobur's offer (even just to avoid a fight they know they can't yet win), you get to decide how the freed Wizzy and Talanatha feel about that. You can also decide how to handle the super-secret basement. If you have a sense that the characters will return to the lighthouse at some point to take on Hoobur, you can leave the areas beyond this one to be explored at a later date. Alternatively, if the players and characters seem keen on making Hoobur a lifetime ally, you can have the archmage offer them a first job for friendship's sake—exploring the super-secret basement and clearing out any threats there. See "Secret Door" below.

Okay, to Fight

If the characters are itching for combat, Hoobur casts *wall of force* or *globe of invulnerability* to show off his spellcasting prowess. If the characters don't back off, he sighs as he uses *lightning bolt* or *cone of cold* to get down to business. (At your discretion, give Hoobur a spell save DC of 15 and +7 to hit with spell attacks because he's a little out of it. Maybe there's more in that tea than just tea, right?)

Hoobur is not much into combat, however, and the first time he takes any damage, he snarls at the characters and casts *time stop*. With his extra actions, he pulls and uses a *spell scroll* of *teleportation* to flee somewhere safe, leaving the characters to fight his minions.

The keg robot attacks at the first sign of trouble involving Hoobur. Unless you want the characters to claim the construct, it fights until destroyed. Wizzy also joins the fray, but he moves in a stilted and exaggerated manner that shows he's not acting of his own free will.

Talanatha's End? As soon as Hoobur escapes, a glowing draconic skull with a sword piercing it appears on Talanatha's forehead as she struggles against her bonds. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check can tell she's turning into an undead creature. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, the character knows the group has 2 rounds to stop the transformation. A character within 5 feet of the table must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check to remove the draconic sigil and stop the transformation. If the characters kill Talanatha in the hope of stopping the ritual, the change occurs immediately.

If Talanatha turns into a vampire spawn, she's still restrained on the table and needs to succeed on a DC 15 Strength check to break her bonds. Once she's free, she attacks the characters with abandon. If the vampire spawn threatens to overwhelm the party, you can say that the manner in which she was suddenly transformed keeps her Regeneration trait from functioning.

Treasure. If the characters force Hoobur to flee, the gnome leaves a number of valuables behind. The equipment in the lab amounts to alchemist's supplies, carpenter's tools, a herbalism kit, a poisoner's kit, thieves' tools, and tinker's tools. Hanging on a hook in the corner is a *cloak of the manta ray*. Hoobur also has two *potions of greater healing*, a *potion of resistance* (necrotic), a *potion of water breathing*, and a *spell scroll* of *teleport* on his person. (If Hoobur does a deal to have the characters clear out the super-secret dungeon, he offers the cloak and two potions of their choice as payment.)

Talanatha Three-Coins

Teleportation Panel. Where the characters appeared in the empty corner of the room, the wall contains a glowing teleportation panel keyed to the lighthouse lens. Any creature touching the panel is teleported through the lens to the lantern room.

Developments. If Wizzy is knocked unconscious instead of being killed, the gnome mage regains his senses when he awakens. He can remember little about the attack on the lighthouse or the time spent with Hoobur. He does remember hiding the *rotor of return*, which he reveals to the characters at the adventure's conclusion if they haven't found it already.

Secret Door. If Hoobur Gran'Shoop offers the characters the job of clearing out the super-secret basement, he shows them the secret door behind the bookcase. If not, any character who searches the room and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check notes scuff marks on the floor near the bookcase or spots the hinges on it. The bookcase swivels open to reveal a passage beyond. Talanatha is also aware of the doorway, having seen Hoobur open it to toss garbage into the hallway beyond.

Super-Secret Basement

The kindly old wizard who built the lighthouse and its underground laboratory went by many names over his long life. By the point at which he decided it was time to slow down a bit, he was simply called Screve. However, he had more than a few other names throughout his career as a slinger of magic, including Brutar the Bloody, Murst the Merciless, and That Wizard Who Fried All Those People in Suzail. Screve was an edgy sort, in other words.

Most of Screve's "normal" wizarding work was undertaken in the laboratory that Hoobur found and utilized. But he also had a secret series of chambers off the main basement where he did some more ... esoteric arcane experimentation.

General Features

No one has fully explored this area in more than a decade, since Screve left his mechanical creations to sit dormant. The hallways and rooms are dusty, showing few signs of life or movement. Except where otherwise noted, all areas of the super-secret basement have the following features.

Light. The basement is dark. Torch sconces and hooks for lanterns can be found in each room, but no lanterns or torches are present.

Ceiling. The ceilings in areas 1 through 3 are 10 feet high and flat, while the arched ceiling in area 4 is 20 feet high to accommodate the mechachimera there.

Walls and Floors. The basement is all worked stone, but the walls and floors have begun to crumble in spots. Cracks and crevices are common, but are too small to admit anything but insects and other tiny vermin.

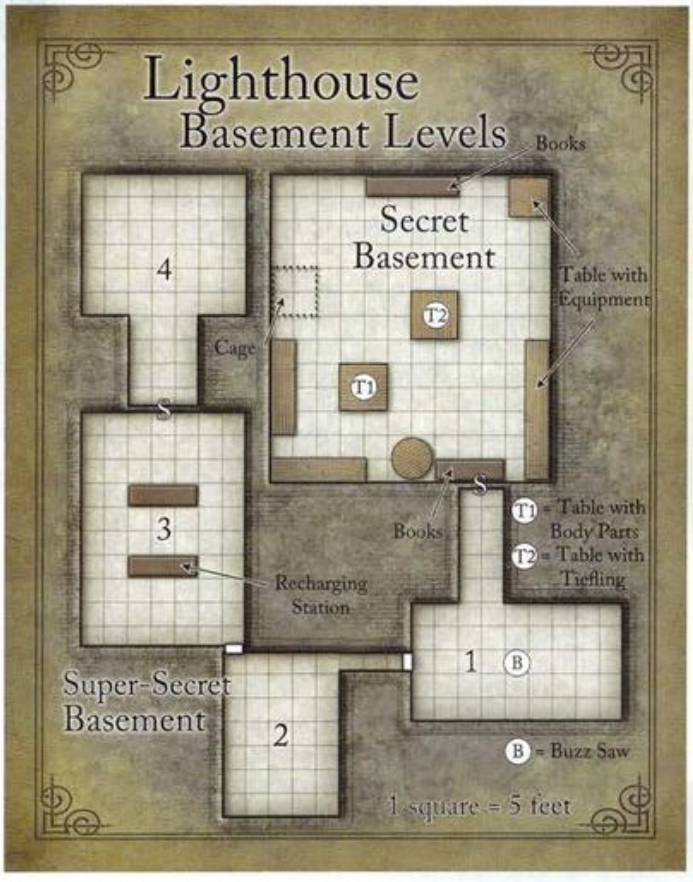
Automatic Doors. A number of doors in the super-secret basement are activated by placing magically charged disks into special slots. Those doors open automatically, remaining open until the disks are removed. The doors cannot be opened by any other means.

Replica Modrons

A number of "modrons" found in this area are replicas crafted by Screve. Each uses the stat block of one type of modron from the *Monster Manual* with these changes:

- The creature is unaligned.
- It lacks truesight and instead has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet.
- It can understand Common but speaks only preprogrammed responses.
- If the modron has a flying speed, the replica has wings but can't fly.
- The modron's Disintegration trait results in the replica falling into a pile of parts—gears, plates, screws, and wires—rather than turning to dust.

Each collapsed modron also spits out a six-inch-diameter magically charged disk that powers the creature, as well as a platinum rod. The disks are of use to the characters as they explore the super-secret basement, and the rods can be claimed as treasure, as noted in the areas where they appear.



Map 3.2: Lighthouse Basement

1. Out of Service

Opening the secret door reveals a hallway leading to this area.

> The dust in the hallway is thick, disturbed only by tiny vermin that have settled into a pile of trash just beyond the secret door. At the end of the hall, a chamber opens up, within which leather tarps cover twelve spherical objects placed along the walls. In the center of the room, another tarp covers a larger cylindrical object. Dusty webs cover everything. A metal door stands closed in the center of the adjacent wall.

Creatures. The "spherical objects" covered with tarps are Screve's attempts to create monodrones to serve him. These twelve replica modrons look exactly like their true modron counterparts and use the **monodrone** stat block, with the changes noted in "Replica Modrons" above.

If the characters disturb any tarp covering a monodrone, the constructs all spring to life, whirring and clanking. Issuing a metallic cry of "Intruders!", the replica monodrones attack until destroyed.

Buzz Saw of Doom. The cylindrical object in the room's center looks like two barrels placed atop one another, with sharp, circular blades jutting out in various directions. When the monodrones activate, so does the buzz saw of doom.

JASON ENGLE

On initiative count 0, the buzz saw moves up to 20 feet in a random direction on rollers, then makes a melee attack against a random creature within 5 feet of it: +3 to hit; 3 (1d4 + 1) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. The buzz saw makes no distinction between the monodrones and the characters when it attacks.

The buzz saw of doom has AC 17, 50 hit points, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and resistance to all other damage. It can also be deactivated as follows:

- The device has an easily spotted 6-inch-wide slot on its back, with the edge of a round disk protruding from it. A character within 5 feet of the buzz saw who succeeds on a DC 10 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check can pull out a charged disk from the slot, causing the buzz saw to power down. This charged disk is identical to the disks that power the replica modrons.
- A character can topple the buzz saw over with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. If tipped over, the buzz saw can still attack, but it can't move.

Treasure. Each destroyed monodrone reveals a magically charged disk and a small platinum rod as part of its components. Each rod is worth 20 gp.

Door. The door exiting this area is made of steel, and is closed and locked. Its only features are three 6-inch-wide slots set in a row at its center. The characters can easily note that the charged disks from any fallen modrons fit perfectly into the slots. If a charged disk is placed in each slot, it completes a circuit that automatically opens the door inward into area 1. It also activates the creatures in area 2.

2. Incomplete Circuits

As the door opens toward you, a buzzing sound rises from beyond a dusty corridor ahead. At the end of the corridor, a room covered in dust and webs opens up. Six mechanical cubes with arms and legs scurry about, disturbing the dust for what appears to be the first time in years. Each carries pieces of wire, which it attempts to place into gaps between other wires set into the crumbling walls. Another metal door stands along the wall across from the end of the corridor.

Creatures. Four replica duodrones, activated by the door opening, are tasked with maintaining circuits in this room, which have become badly corroded over time. Their second task is to remove intruders who attack them or attempt to open the door into area 3. These replica modrons look exactly like their true modron counterparts and use the **duodrone** stat block, with the changes noted in "Replica Modrons" above.

In addition, hidden in the webs on the ceiling are two **swarms of insects (spiders)**, which have come to dominate the vermin food chain in this area.

Tactics. A character must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the swarms hiding in the webs. One swarm drops on the first character to come into the room, gaining surprise if the character is unaware of it. The other swarm lurks on the other side of the room, and attacks in the second round of combat.

Unless they are attacked first, the duodrones ignore the characters to start. But if combat with the swarms goes to three rounds, the duodrones assume they are under attack and enter the fight. They target the characters as intruders but ignore the swarms. Or if the swarms are doing a good enough job against the characters, the duodrones could provide comic relief by trying futilely to sweep the spiders away while getting in the way of the characters' attacks.

Treasure. Each destroyed duodrone reveals its magically charged disk and platinum rod. Each rod is worth 20 gp.

Door. The steel door between areas 2 and 3 has no features. However, the characters easily spot four slots on the wall next to the door, into which charged disks can be inserted. Wires run between these slots, this door, and the door to area 1, but the wires on the crumbling walls show several gaps. Spare wires are easily had by digging through duodrone wreckage or pulling them from other areas of the wall, allowing the circuit to be completed. If the characters need assistance in figuring this out, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check to study the walls and assess the duodrones' activities can fill in the details.

When the characters complete the circuit and insert charged disks into the four slots, the door automatically opens into this area, revealing area 3 and activating the mechanical creatures in that area.

3. Recharging Station

A buzzing sound and a deep hum rises suddenly as the door opens, and a blast of musty, dust-choked air spills out from the room beyond. That dusty chamber holds three creatures that look like inverted pyramids with mechanical arms and legs, and another creature resembling a cube with wings. All of them work to place parts into two fifteen-foot-wide, floor-to-ceiling, metallic walls at the room's center. Those walls are the source of the hum, and each glows with a faint light. As one of the creatures shuffles through the ten-foot-wide gap between the two walls, it begins to glow as the walls do.

Creatures. The opening of the door has activated three replica tridrones and one replica quadrone, whose task is to bring a modron charging station—the two metallic walls—back online. These replica modrons look exactly like their true modron counterparts and use **tridrone** and **quadrone** stat blocks, with the changes noted in "Replica Modrons" above.

It takes the replica modrons 5 rounds to reassemble the station. As they make progress, the hum from the station intensifies, as does its glow. After completing that task, the modrons assemble the five charged disks they need for the secret door in the far wall, which takes another 5 rounds. They then open the secret door to check on the mechachimera in area 4.

The tridrones and quadrone attack if they are attacked, if the characters interfere with their tasks, or if any character moves between the recharging station's walls.

Recharging Station. The recharging station functions by pulsing power into any creature or object that moves into the area between the two rectangular walls. In the 5 rounds during which the modrons repair it, the station hums and glows but does nothing more. If the station is repaired, it has the following effects:

- A replica modron that starts its turn within the charging station regains 5 hit points if it has at least 1 hit point.
- A replica modron standing within 5 feet of either of the charging station's walls has advantage on attack rolls.
- Any other creature that enters the area between the rectangular walls must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be stunned for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

The characters can sabotage the recharging station, either before or after it is repaired. As an action, a character within 5 feet of either station wall can attempt a DC 15 Strength (Athletics), Dexterity (Sleight of Hand), or Intelligence (Arcana) check to disable that wall. On a failed check, the character takes 5 (1d10) lightning damage. Both walls must be deactivated to render the recharging station inert. If one wall is deactivated, any of the replica modrons within 5 feet of the wall can use an action to counteract the sabotage. It takes three such actions to reactivate the wall.

Treasure. Any of the destroyed modrons reveal their magically charged disks and platinum rods. Each of these rods is larger than those previously seen, and is worth 50 gp.

Secret Door. A 15-foot-wide secret door is hidden in the wall farthest from the entrance, and contains five concealed slots for charged disks. If the modrons finish repairing the recharging station, or if the characters sabotage the station, a shower of sparks erupts from the edges of the secret door and its slots, revealing the door. Otherwise, a character who searches the area and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check notes the door or the gaps in the mortar where the slots are hidden.

If the characters insert charged disks into each of the door's five slots, the door automatically opens into this area and activates the creatures in the next room.

4. Mechachimera

This chamber holds a construct chimera, Screve's crowning achievement before he gave up his pursuits in this area.

> Thin wires set into the walls of the room beyond the secret door buzz with magic, bathing the room in a blue glow. This chamber is filled with disparate gears, pistons, sprockets, screws, bolts, and countless other mechanical bits—all of which twitch and slide across the floor as if drawn together by some unseen force. The pieces connect and entwine to take the shape of a winged mechanical beast with the heads of a dragon, a lion, and a goat.
>
> A voice calls out from a dark corner of the room. "We have been here for a long time. Please help us go home." Wrapped in padlocked chains in that corner is a creature consisting of five mechanical arms, like those of a starfish, and which stands on five spindly mechanical legs.

Creature. The mechachimera moves to place itself between the characters and the prisoner. It uses the stat block of a **chimera** with these changes:

- It is a construct.
- It has immunity to poison and psychic damage.

In addition to defeating the construct in combat, characters can pull out its charged disks to hinder its attacks. With a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, any character fighting the mechachimera notes that each of its heads features a slot from which a charged disk protrudes slightly. A character within 5 feet of the construct who succeeds on a DC 10 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check can remove a disk, causing one head to power down and preventing it from making attacks. If the dragon head is disabled, the creature loses its Fire Breath. If the goat head is disabled, it loses its horns attack. If the lion head is disabled, it loses its bite attack.

Prisoner. Screve held a **pentadrone** from Mechanus as his prisoner in this area, using the modron as a model for the constructs he was creating. The pentadrone, known as 57EV1E (or "Stevie" to its friends), has been disconnected from the axiomatic mind of Primus, making it a rogue modron. (See the "Variant: Rogue Modrons" sidebar in the modron section of the *Monster Manual*.) It wants to go back to Mechanus and reestablish its link with the rest of its kind.

Stevie is willing and able to help the characters, but it must be freed from the padlocked chains that restrain it. One locked chain secures each of the modron's five arms. A successful DC 13 Dexterity check using thieves' tools opens one lock and removes the attached chain. The chains can also be severed (AC 10, 15 hit points, immune to poison and psychic damage) or broken with a successful DC 20 Strength check. The manner in which Stevie is tightly bound prevents the modron from attacking or trying to break the chains.

Treasure. The mechachimera falls apart when destroyed, revealing five large platinum rods worth 100 gp each, as well as its three charged disks. In addition, characters poking through the construct's remains can spot two magic items that were part of its components—a *sentinel shield* and a *Quaal's feather token (anchor)*.

Development. If the characters release Stevie, the modron is grateful for the rescue and happy to share its story. The construct relates the story of how it had been sent to the Material Plane to recover a rogue modron that was spreading chaos, but was captured by Screve. The wizard held the pentadrone prisoner and used it as a model to create replica modrons. (If none of the characters speaks Modron or has some alternative means of communication with the construct, Stevie picked up enough Common from Screve during its years of imprisonment to get by.)

Stevie isn't sure how long it has been separated from the mind of Primus, but it wants desperately to return to Mechanus. You can decide whether the characters can help Stevie with this plight as a side trek or a downtime activity. Alternatively, the modron might have been disconnected from Primus for too long, keeping it a rogue modron that might become a recurring villain or allied NPC.

Conclusion

After dealing with the threats at Silent Sound lighthouse, the characters attain 4th level! They can take stock of whatever treasure they salvaged from the lighthouse and what information they learned within, then figure out their next move.

If the characters didn't find the *rotor of return* when exploring the lighthouse, Wizzy can reveal where the relic is hidden if he survived. He is happy to give it to the characters as thanks for their rescue. Alternatively, if Talanatha survived, she knows that Hoobur Gran'Shoop spoke of not finding the rotor, and can join the characters in another search of the lighthouse.

Talanatha Three-Coins

Assuming that the tiefling Talanatha is rescued, she is both grateful and beholden to the characters. She can fill in any information regarding what happened in Phandalin if the characters have overlooked something, as she can with what the Company of the Golden Mongoose had learned about the orrery.

Talanatha would be keen to work with a franchise whose members are clearly as cool and capable as the characters. However, she's an adventurer, not a follower. As such, she's not suitable as franchise staff but would make an excellent allied NPC or hired troubleshooter (perhaps after joining another franchise). To use Talanatha as an NPC, you can give her the stat block of a **berserker** or **priest** (depending on what use you wish to make of her). Talanatha has these racial traits: She knows the *thaumaturgy* cantrip, and Charisma is her spellcasting ability for this spell. She has resistance to fire damage. She has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. She speaks Common and Infernal.

As a paladin and an iconic occultant franchisee (see "Company Positions" in chapter 2), Talanatha would also make an excellent replacement character if a fight against Hoobur Gran'Shoop went badly for the party.

Returning the Diamonds

If the characters recovered Omin's diamonds, they need to return the goods. It's up to you whether they have to make a side trek to Waterdeep for delivery, or if Omin sends a courier to retrieve the stones. If the characters lost the jewels, the consequences could be financially dire.

The Orrery

With the *rotor of return* in their possession, the characters can undertake additional research into that component and the *Orrery of the Wanderer* as a whole. See appendix D for information on the rotor, which can be revealed as you determine.

Franchise Downtime

The most important piece of information the characters take away from this episode is the "evidence" that Dran Enterprises was involved with the attacks on both Acquisitions Incorporated franchises, back in Phandalin and at the lighthouse. The rumor that Dran Enterprises has a secret headquarters in Luskan can be repeated by both Wizzy and Talanatha, setting the stage for the next episode. If the characters need further prodding to think about heading for Luskan, you could also have the orrery housing provide a mental hint that at least one more of its components has recently been sensed north of the lighthouse, and relatively close.

All the activities mentioned in this section are introduced or talked about in the "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" section in chapter 2.

The Luskan Connection

Making use of scrutineering, research, carousing, or schmoozing during downtime can all yield up hints confirming that Dran Enterprises has a secret headquarters in the city of Luskan—and adding rumors suggesting that the organization has recently been engaging in conduct even more secretive than usual. Such activities can also preview some of the information on Luskan presented in episode 4.

Modron in Need

The pentadrone Stevie wants to travel back to Mechanus, and the characters could assist by using downtime or franchise tasks to make that happen. Research or schmoozing might gain information from knowledgeable sages regarding existing portals to Mechanus, or unique rituals that can open a temporary portal.

If the characters are successful in helping Stevie get home, the pentadrone thanks them by removing components from itself that reassemble to function as an *axiomatic weapon*, a rare magic item that requires attunement. When an attuned wielder hits a chaotic-aligned creature with this weapon, the target takes 1d6 extra damage of the weapon's type.

Our Very Own Mechachimera

A character trained in Arcana can study the mechachimera's design if its components are laboriously collected and taken from the basement. Over time, a similar construct could be used as an offensive upgrade to the franchise's headquarters, either as part of future franchise advancement or with the headquarters modification franchise task.

Business Is Expanding

Having a small castle estate in Phandalin is cool. But having a lighthouse on the Sword Coast might be even cooler. If it seems like the thing to do, the characters could use the franchise restructuring or headquarters modification activities to officially ask permission to relocate their franchise to the Silent Sound lighthouse. (This assumes that Hoobur Gran'Shoop was driven from the basement, and that the characters are prepared to deal with the possibility of him coming back.)

Even if the characters don't want to officially change territories, nothing prevents them from quietly checking out the commercial landscape in the area. Characters searching the sea caves along the cliffs near the lighthouse might find that a variety of ne'er-do-wells use them as places to hide from naval pursuers, stow contraband, secure prisoners held for ransom, and engage in other nefarious activities. Joining in on (or getting a percentage of) such activities could be set up with the shady business practice activity—possibly connecting to any deal the characters have recently struck with the newly installed captain of a fast ship.

Living the Good Life

Characters not wanting to flout the law (or at least not to do so outside their own territory) could instead clear out smugglers and other riffraff along the coast. Doing so as part of a philanthropic enterprise could get them in good with the authorities in Neverwinter or Luskan.

Taking over the lighthouse also provides the opportunity for a philanthropic enterprise. The light is a warning beacon for ships traveling the coast between Neverwinter and Luskan, but it needs someone to keep it running. Before the Order of the Stout Half-Pint moved in, the authorities in Luskan and Neverwinter struggled to entice anyone to live at the remote lighthouse, given the amount of dangerous bandit and pirate activity in the area. If the characters take over the lighthouse or arrange for it to be staffed, they'll earn the favor of Neverwinter, Luskan, and possibly even the Lords' Alliance for their generosity.

Continuing the Adventure

While the characters are engaged in downtime and franchise activities, Omin Dran makes contact. He embraces the characters' reports from Phandalin and the Silent Sound lighthouse as proof that Dran Enterprises is involved in the attacks against Acq Inc franchises, and that its agents are willing to kill to claim the components of the *Orrery of the Wanderer*. However, something about that approach feels inconsistent with Dran Enterprises' normal approach to acquisition. A ruthless attitude and wanting Acquisitions Incorporated taken apart and absorbed into its own corporate space is one thing, but doing it one franchise at a time seems odd. As such, Omin wants more information before committing to reprisals or confrontation.

The characters are directed to go to Luskan to confirm that Dran Enterprises has a secret headquarters in that lawless city. If they do, they then need to find and infiltrate the operation, learning as much as they can about the plans of Acquisitions Incorporated's biggest business rival!

Episode 4: Dran Enterprises

The attacks on Acquisitions Incorporated franchises have left signs indicating that Dran Enterprises is involved. The characters (now 4th level) head to Luskan, seeking to find that organization's secret headquarters, infiltrate it, and determine what Dran Enterprises is up to—and what plans they have for the *Orrery of the Wanderer*.

The search for the headquarters takes the characters first to the rough-and-tumble Fishbone Tavern, then to Arla Razortongue, a disgruntled Dran Enterprises ex-employee running a well-known peg and hook shop. After dealing with thugs sent to quiet Arla, the characters learn the location of Dran Enterprises' secret headquarters, and can plan their infiltration.

That headquarters is a seemingly small and unimportant ship at the Luskan docks. But Dran Enterprises' magic has filled the ship with portals leading to some of the faction's many franchises, ships, and business locations. When the characters visit, those portals lead to:

- A dead ship being consumed by the power of the Far Realm—which quickly threatens to consume the characters as well.
- A faction warehouse whose overworked attendant will help them only if they help her.
- A Dran Enterprises cargo ship caught in a raging storm, and which will founder on rocks unless the characters lend the crew a hand.
- Another cargo ship whose well-armed crew will finish the characters off in short order unless they make their way through the rigging unseen.
- A Dran Enterprises pirate crew under attack by undead at a remote dock.
- An array of merchant barges that must be crossed while moving along a busy river.

Only by traveling through a sufficient number of these portals can the characters key themselves to activating the portal to Dran Enterprises' true headquarters—a palatial ship named *The Maverick*. There, they are met by a Dran Enterprises operative who is aware of their quest, and who informs them that Dran Enterprises in fact has nothing to do with the attacks against the two Acquisitions Incorporated franchises. Moreover, Dran Enterprises is also aware of the dark power of the *Orrery of the Wanderer*—and its operatives have collected two of the orrery's components, hoping to keep that power in check. But the characters are not alone as they seek this information. Operatives of the Six are already within the portal network, and are racing to claim the orrery components collected by Dran Enterprises before the characters do.

KLAUS PILLON

Dran Enterprises' *Dangerous Business*

Traveling to Luskan

The City of Sails is located far to the north of the Sword Coast, and the journey there can be as eventful as you desire. If the players are hankering for random encounters, the wild lands of the North can certainly oblige them. Or you might wish to have the journey pass in relative peace while the players coordinate franchise tasks left over from the previous episode.

Luskan rests upon stone escarpments on either side of the icy River Mirar. Three bridges, named Upstream Span, Dalath's Span, and Long Span, cross forty feet above the river to connect the two sides of the city. The Open Shore docks sit on the northernmost edge of the river, while Dragon Beach holds docks to the south. As they seek out Dran Enterprises' secret headquarters, the characters start in the south and work their way to the Open Shore docks.

A key aspect of Luskan life is its rule by groups known as Ships. Five High Captains each rule a Ship made up of pirates and other Northlanders. Ship Kurth, under High Captain Beniago Kurth, is the First Ship, which controls the city's docks and trade. Ship Baram is the Second Ship, operating the fishing industry. Third Ship Suljack leads piracy and raiding, handing down less-desirable opportunities to Fourth Ship Taerl. Fifth Ship Rethnor acts as the city's guard—an unprofitable enough duty that many of its members look for other ways to earn coin.

The order of mages known as the Arcane Brotherhood is the other major power group in Luskan. Though its members include ambitious arcanists of any and all genders, the newly restored order maintains its original name as a reflection of its past power—and as a sign that it seeks to restore that power once again.

If you want to make Luskan a bigger part of your campaign, more information about the city can be found in the *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*.

Searching for Dran Enterprises

The characters' main goal in this episode is to find Dran Enterprises' secret headquarters. However, owing to that organization's habit of breaking the legs of anyone who talks about company business, this information is hard to come by. Thankfully, the characters are able to learn that Dran Enterprises employees often frequent a specific tavern in Luskan, giving them a starting point for seeking the information they need.

The characters can learn the name and location of the Fishbone tavern in any number of ways, including talking to other tavern owners, seeking out merchants and mercenaries who've done business with Dran Enterprises, and the like. Two example encounters are provided to help the characters find the tavern. You can add similar encounters to increase the complexity of the search as desired.

Trouble at the South Gate

The characters are assumed to enter Luskan from the south. Modify the text below as needed to fit their arrival.

A sharp, icy wind whistles through South Gate as you enter Luskan. The shops and taverns lining the main thoroughfare of the City of Sails are as battered and weathered as the grim customers entering them. At first glance, the city's reputation as a den for pirates and raiders appears well earned.

Just ahead of you, a wagon has broken down in front of a tavern. The elderly human driver calls out for help, but passersby ignore her. As she calls out once more, the tavern door behind her opens and two guards toss a young male human in bright clothing out into the street. He tumbles into the old woman, sending both of them sprawling to the ground. The door closes, then opens once more as a mandolin comes flying out of the tavern.

If the characters want to lend a hand, they have ample opportunity to step up. Catching the mandolin requires a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, and if no party member tries to do so, it crashes to the ground at the characters' feet.

The tavern is called the Last Dregs, and the owners don't care for strangers. Allow the characters a quick look in if they like, but there are no leads to Dran Enterprises to be found here.

Failed Minstrel. The minstrel Noriel (NG male human **commoner**) has spent a rough month in Luskan. He believes that his father was once a pirate working for one of the Ships, but he's had no luck so far tracking him down. Noriel's poor sense of fashion, nervousness, and lack of musical skill have not helped his efforts. An impressionable (and starving) teenager, he faithfully serves anyone who takes him under their wing, and can provide comic relief as desired.

Having been thrown out of countless taverns, Noriel knows the general rumors talking of how Dran Enterprises has a secret headquarters somewhere in Luskan. He also knows the even more widespread rumors of how Dran Enterprises punishes anyone who talks about the organization's business. However, he has heard and shares that many Dran Enterprises employees wander the northern part of the city in their off hours.

Where Is the Orrery?

At some point before the party arrives in Luskan, ask the players whether their characters are bringing the orrery housing and any components with them, and if so, who carries the relics. If they plan instead to secure them elsewhere, ask about that location and their security measures. For the purpose of the adventure, it's best if the characters keep the orrery components with them, rather than leaving them at headquarters. (Certainly, reminding the characters of what happened to the last two franchise headquarters that held orrery components should be enough to inspire them to hold onto the components themselves.)

You don't need this information now, but it becomes relevant in episode 5. Asking now gives the players time to forget you asked!

Always Be Branding

As long as they're in Luskan, the characters might take the opportunity to try to extend their franchise's reach into the city. A formal presence in this far-flung territory is far beyond the scope of their charter of operations, naturally. And savvy franchisees might have heard rumors that Head Office is working to open a franchise in the City of Sails. However, clever players could work to increase their own franchise's notoriety and add a few more customers without unduly violating the terms of their contract. You might tie such attempts to future franchise tasks or downtime incorporating the shady business practice activity, as the characters try to keep an official distance from any Luskan opportunities.

Driver in Need. Dabahl (NG female human **commoner**) works as a wagon driver out of Neverwinter, and her hired help all fled after a failed bandit attack during her most recent run north. She made it safely to Luskan alone, but her wagon wheel has just given out.

Repairing Dabahl's wagon takes at least 1 hour and requires a successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) or Wisdom (Survival) check. The DC drops to 10 if the characters spend 20 gp on replacement parts, if any character knows the *mending* cantrip, or if any character is proficient with land vehicles.

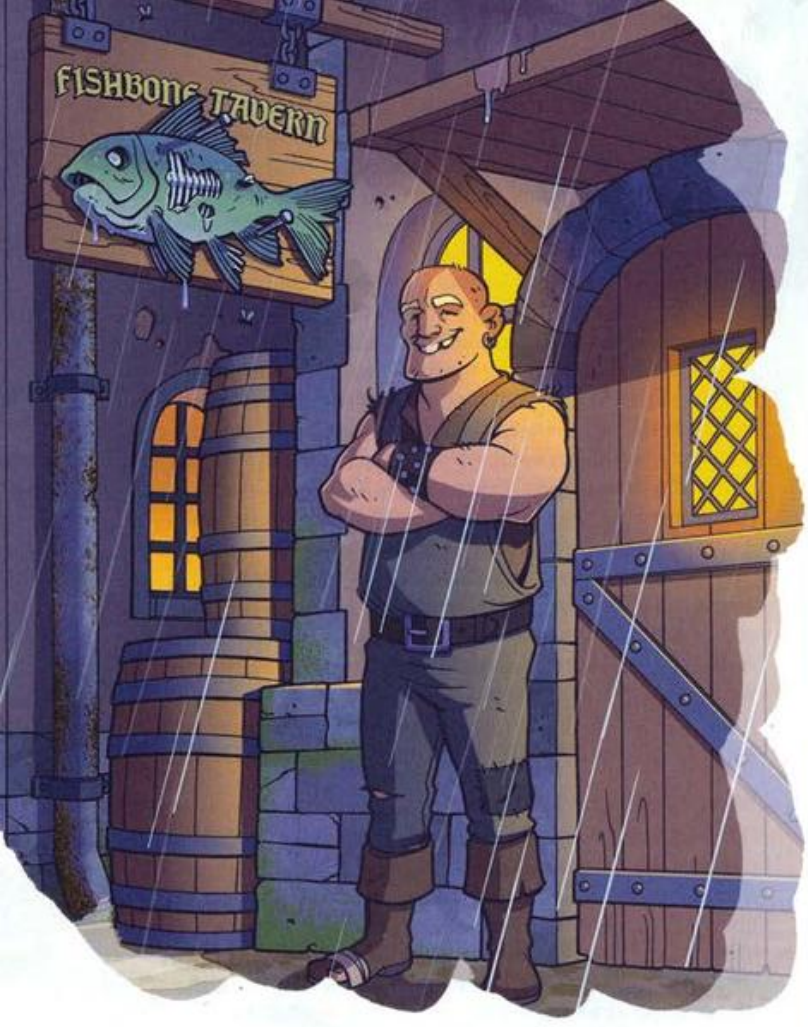
Dabahl cannot afford the repairs or offer to pay the characters for their service, but in her gratitude, she can share that Dran Enterprises has a nefarious reputation. The location of their headquarters is a closely guarded secret, but the organization's employees are said to favor a tavern frequented by fishers. Dabahl sells her goods to Ship Kurth and could also introduce the characters to its merchants, though she does not have any influence with them.

The Broker

With a couple of initial clues at hand, the characters can start the search in earnest for the tavern frequented by Dran Enterprises employees. Unfortunately, most folk in Luskan are smart enough to not talk about Dran Enterprises too openly, and the characters are rebuffed or ignored during their initial inquiries. Eventually, though, the party is referred to Eriss (N female gnome **commoner**), said to broker deals between guilds and other organizations.

Eriss works with Ship Taerl, and can be found in a small but well-maintained curio shop on a busy street just north of the city's central bridge, Dalath's Span. An enormous half-orc **thug** named One-Tusk stands guard outside the shop. Eriss is inside, polishing bottles containing miniature ships. She claims that these were once real ships, forced into the bottles through powerful magic. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check suggests that this story isn't worth a ship-in-a-bottle's 100 gp sale price. However, Eriss answers the party's questions only if they buy one of the models or another equally expensive curio from her shop.

What Eriss Knows. Speaking with Eriss is not without risk. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check confirms that the gnome is a broker for criminal organizations, trading information and helping stolen goods



find their ways to buyers. A result of 15 or higher on this check also imparts that like most fixers, Eriss is hesitant to engage with the enemies of any company she wants to stay on good terms with.

When the characters inquire about Dran Enterprises, the gnome asks why they seek the organization. If she gets any hint that the characters are opposed to Dran Enterprises, she sends a message warning operatives of the organization as soon as the party leaves her shop. If the characters suspect this, they might need to attempt DC 15 Charisma checks (using Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion, depending on the situation) to talk Eriss down.

If the characters stay on her good side, Eriss confides that she doesn't know where Dran Enterprises has its headquarters. However, she can share that the employees of the organization sometimes gather at a watering hole known as Fishbone Tavern. They keep a low profile, but the tavern's bartender, Fryer, might be able to identify a member of Dran Enterprises or help the characters further.

Fishbone Tavern

Any fisher or laborer in the north of the city can provide directions to Fishbone Tavern. None of the NPCs currently at the tavern know the location of Dran Enterprises headquarters, but they can provide pointers to someone who does.

Extending the Luskan Experience

NPC scenes can encourage cooperative roleplaying, so give the players lots of space to discuss how to help characters like Noriel and Dabahl—and then run with the players' ideas. A desire to help Noriel could lead to helping the bard land a paying gig at a tavern, or seeking out one of the Ships or the loremasters of the Arcane Brotherhood to learn of his father. Helping Dabahl could lead to an encounter with a guild of teamsters or a disgruntled repair shop employee. Such efforts could lead to additional roleplaying scenarios, to which you can add ability checks and combat encounters as desired.

Of course, some players will simply ignore Dabahl and Noriel. That's okay. Let the characters' reactions take things in a different direction, and have a different NPC provide the same information. However, always feel free to have Dabahl or Noriel make another appearance. Maybe the two team up, with Noriel helping improvise the repairs (soon to fail at any time), while Dabahl teaches Noriel a song or two. Their story can move forward, intersecting with the party's story at a later opportune moment.

Fishbone Tavern is located a few blocks from Luskan's Open Shore docks, close enough that you can smell the sea air and hear the cries of gulls swooping over the fishing ships. A few lazy snowflakes fall from a cloudy sky as you approach the tavern's front entrance—and a sign decorated with an actual rotting fish nailed to a board bearing the tavern's name. Standing before the door is an immense figure who beams a smile missing most of its teeth. He squints his eyes as if trying to make sense of you. "What ... uh ... what's your business here?"

The dimwitted bouncer is Zurb (CG male human **thug**). Zurb's job is to keep any potential troublemakers out of the raucous tavern, including enemies of Dran Enterprises. Fortunately for the party, he can be fooled very easily with some skillful roleplaying or appropriate ability checks.

Zurb knows (and absolutely shouldn't share but does) that employees of Dran Enterprises drink at the Fishbone frequently, though he hasn't seen any of them in a few days. He ponders a while on how that's rather unusual. Zurb can suggest the characters talk to Fryer the bartender to figure out why. (She earned that name when she hit a would-be-thief with a searing-hot frying pan.) Zurb can also describe any of the tavern's regulars, including warning the characters that Rakeem can't be trusted.

When the characters decide to enter, Zurb opens the door for them. If the characters have befriended him, Zurb announces them as "really nice people that talked a lot." This causes Fryer to shake her head in weary disbelief.

DARREN M. A. CALVERT

The interior of the Fishbone Tavern is cramped and shadowy. Only two of the eight tables are occupied, one by two fishers and another by a lone figure in a dark, leather-patched cloak. One wall holds a small, smoky fireplace, while a long bar of dark-stained wood stands along the opposite wall. Standing behind the bar under oval plaques set with yellowing fish skeletons is a heavy-set human bartender. She pours ale for a half-elf seated at the bar, quietly engaging him in conversation.

Friends of Dran Enterprises

Fryer (N female human **commoner**) is the owner of the Fishbone Tavern. Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 12 or higher might hear her refer to the half-elf as Rakeem as she talks to him. She is in the service of Dran Enterprises, receiving payment for keeping an eye on the organization's employees and reporting any lack of loyalty to their management.

Although Fryer is tight with Dran Enterprises, she carries a certain amount of guilt over an incident from a few months ago. She reported a former friend and Dran Enterprises operative named Arla Razortongue to her bosses for speaking out about the organization's unethical practices. (See "The Peg and Hook" below for more on Arla.) Recent word on the street is that Arla continues to be a thorn in Dran Enterprises' side—and that she's been marked for exile or elimination. A character might sense Fryer's remorse over having sold Arla out with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check, and could encourage her to share what took place and where to find Arla with appropriate roleplaying.

Rakeem (N male half-elf **spy**) is a regular drinker at the Fishbone, a friend to Fryer, and a professional snitch. Though not in the employ of Dran Enterprises, Rakeem tries to sell any information he overhears regarding the organization. If the characters talk openly about Dran Enterprises while Rakeem is anywhere in the tavern, he overhears them and alerts company operatives as to the characters' intentions.

A character notices Rakeem spying on the group with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight or Perception) check. Rakeem is not eager to fight, though, and once confronted, he can be persuaded or intimidated into keeping anything he heard to himself—at least until the party leaves town. He might also be convinced to share what he knows with appropriate bribes or well-worded threats.

Word on the street is that Dran Enterprises has "turtled up," retreating into wherever they hide due to some trouble known to the company's higher-ups. Rakeem doesn't know what that trouble is, but one person who keeps her ear to the ground about Dran Enterprises is Arla at the Peg and Hook (see below). He can share Arla's story and provide directions to her shop.

Working-Class Rumors

The two fishers drinking at a central table are Milo and Tortuk (both N male human **commoners**). Both are deep into their cups, lamenting their inability to find employment on the better fishing boats owned by Ship Baram. Even inebriated, they know enough to be wary at the idea of talking about Dran Enterprises to strangers. They do offer up, though, that they haven't seen any Dran Enterprises employees in going on a tenday now. It's an easy guess that there's a big operation in progress, but neither fisher knows what that might be.

The lone figure sitting at a corner table is Velos (N male human **bandit**), nursing a glass of rum and rubbing his hand. A pirate by trade, Velos tries to conceal that his hand is turning black with infection after an injury during a recent raid. Without treatment such as a *lesser restoration* spell, he will lose the hand, and he can't afford treatment. Velos knows Arla and her story, and knows that he and his hand will be bound for the Peg and Hook shop before long.

If the characters help Velos and mention their interest in Dran Enterprises, he shares that he recently overheard a melancholy employee talking about how a friend "got invited to headquarters but accidentally took a wrong door. They managed to scoop up what was left of him." His gratitude also makes him a solid potential hire, especially if the franchise has future business in Luskan.

Moving Things Along

If the characters need help connecting the dots, Rakeem could make an obvious mistake such as tipping his stool over from trying to strain to hear the party. Or Velos could fall unconscious from his wound, allowing the characters to see his predicament and win Fryer over to their cause with some beneficial healing. Alternatively, an NPC the characters have previously confided in might appear (perhaps Noriel or Dabahl), asking loudly whether the characters have found Dran Enterprises yet, and provoking a noticeable reaction from Fryer and Rakeem.

Once the characters have learned about Arla from any of the possible sources at the Fishbone, they can travel to her shop.

The Peg and Hook

Arla Razortongue (CG female human **spy** with iconic Dran Enterprises employee features; see "Iconic Faction Features" in appendix B) had a good thing going as an employee of Dran Enterprises. So when she was fired from that organization, the need to start over again in the cutthroat environs of Luskan inspired her to think outside the box. Way, way outside. Given the number of seedy sailors that call the City of Sails their home port, she knew that a shop helping pirates with limb replacements would always make money. However, she felt that a hook was more useful as a replacement for a leg (instead of the traditional peg leg), and that a peg was more useful to replace a lost hand.

Dran Enterprises ignored Arla at first, convinced that she would be a failure. Surprisingly, though, the plucky entrepreneur managed to convince enough pirates to try out her unconventional system that her business thrived. She has since developed a number of unique attachments (hook shoes, peg arm accessories) that provide surprising functionality—and even replaced one of her own hands and a leg to prove her point.

Talk First, Fight Later?

When the characters approach the Peg and Hook, first decide whether their previous investigation has alerted Dran Enterprises. If they allowed Rakeem to eavesdrop and report their conversations, alerted Eriss the broker of their antagonistic intentions, or asked too many strangers how to find the organization, a strike team is already inside the shop and attacking Arla. Go straight to "Dran Strike Team" below and roll for initiative.

If the characters were discreet in their inquiries, Arla is alone in her shop and can be approached in any way they want. Then run the "Dran Strike Team" encounter as the characters prepare to leave the shop.

Talking to Arla

Arla initially assumes the characters are customers, and points out various arm peg accessories, hook foot options, and other products she has developed. She then whips out a bone saw and asks which of the characters she can help first.

When she realizes the characters aren't customers, Arla is disappointed, but she's open to their questions. She despises Dran Enterprises, and is willing to help anyone who opposes that organization. Conveniently (for her), she's also looking for investors to help her expand her burgeoning business. She initially asks for 1,000 gp for her information, or half as much if the characters bring her a paying customer. She can be talked down to 500 gp, or 250 gp with one customer.

Velos the pirate (from the Fishbone tavern) is a potential customer for Arla, but many others can be found around the city. Talking a stranger into getting a hook for a leg or a peg for an arm is best left to humorous roleplaying, but could also be accomplished with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Getting a limb replaced costs 25 gp, and Arla offers no-interest payment plans.

The Hidden Headquarters

Arla shares that Dran Enterprises' true headquarters is an expensive and well-appointed flagship called *The Maverick*. The ship sails constantly, rarely putting into port for security reasons. But the organization has a much more subtle and just as secret alternative headquarters that hides in plain sight at the heart of Luskan.

A tiny and unassuming ship named *Dangerous Business* is always moored at the Open Shore docks, and is more than it appears. The ship houses a series of magic portals leading to various Dran Enterprises warehouses, ships, marketplaces—and to *The Maverick* itself. Each of *Dangerous Business*'s magic portals is set with and activated by a differently shaped and colored stone. Employees memorize where each stone leads, but the configuration changes on a regular schedule. Moreover, employees are subject to enchantment magic that prevents them from sharing the information. Arla does not know the current portal configuration.

Being Noticed

As the characters rise in level and franchise rank, NPCs will begin to take notice of them, and not just vice versa. Rather than the adventurers constantly thinking about which NPCs might make solid prospective business partners, those NPCs might start showing up later in the adventure to pitch the franchise on commercial deals. Keep note of which NPCs the players have the most fun interacting with, and keep those NPCs in mind for future engagement. Conversely, the NPCs the players most actively dislike could become foes, joining Dran Enterprises or the Six, then appearing later in the campaign to pay the characters back for some real or imagined slight.

Dran Strike Team

A Dran Enterprises strike team has been sent to deal with either the characters or Arla, depending on how the characters got here. The team is led by a fixer named Hoffman (LN female human **veteran** with iconic Dran Enterprises employee features; see "Iconic Faction Features" in appendix B). If Dran Enterprises has been alerted to the characters' investigations, the strike team is already inside the shop when the party arrives, preparing to take Arla out. Otherwise, the strike team has been sent coincidentally to shake down Arla, as some of the higher-ups at Dran Enterprises aren't happy with their disgraced employee's success. In that case, the strike team enters the shop just as the characters start to leave.

The team's primary objective is to convince Arla to abandon her business and leave town. If she won't, they have orders to kill her. Hoffman focuses on attacking Arla, castigating her verbally and physically

for being a traitor to Dran Enterprises. In combat, Arla's shortsword attacks take the form of either her sharpened leg hook or a retractable blade attached to her arm peg.

Hoffman is backed up by three operatives named Pieter, Marks, and Molley (each a N male halfling), each using the **spy** stat block. The three spies use the mobility afforded by their Cunning Action to change targets, and can be easily goaded into focusing on the characters and ignoring Arla.

Treasure

The strike team members are dressed in fur cloaks and leathers, and their weapons and armor are well maintained. They have the equivalent of a priest's pack and an explorer's pack between them, plus a total of 180 gp.

Hoffman wears a round metal pin bearing the symbol of Dran Enterprises, and which radiates abjuration to a *detect magic* spell or similar effect. The pin allows passage through the portal doors on the Dran Enterprises ship (see the next section).

Infiltrating Dran Enterprises

Dangerous Business is a small sailboat with a single cabin rising from the center of its deck. It is docked alongside two larger sailing ships (named *The Ghost* and *The Rogue*). All three ships are owned by Dran Enterprises, with the two larger ships housing fishers, pirates, and others in the company's employ.

Map 4.1 shows the layout of the docks where the characters make their initial approach to Dran Enterprises headquarters.

Racing Against the Six

As the characters seek an approach to *Dangerous Business* and the portals within, they are unaware that they are competing against the Six, who have already infiltrated the ship and are seeking Dran Enterprise's main headquarters aboard *The Maverick*. The Six are initially at no more advantage than the characters are in their search for the headquarters, but the characters' actions might tip that balance one way or the other.

During this part of the episode, you'll track a one-off mechanic called "failure points," which are used to represent the race against the Six and determine which side finds the headquarters first. The resolution of that search is described in the "On Board *The Maverick*" section, but the characters will have opportunities before that to realize they are competing against the Six. When that becomes clear, you can underscore any situation in which the party earns a failure point, letting the players know that accumulating too many points means that the Six will pass through the final portal and arrive at *The Maverick* first.

In addition to you tracking the number of failure points, each time the party earns a failure point, you gain a pool of two **guards**. You can add one or more guards from your pool to any scene within the "Portal Nexus" section of this episode. Whenever these guards appear, they enter the scene aware that Acquisitions Incorporated and the Six have infiltrated their territory, and are actively looking for intruders.

Map 4.1: The Docks

Dangerous Business

This humorously small ship is watched over by four **guards** that stand a silent vigil around the cabin. The ship can be reached from the main dock or the smaller jetty leading out between *Dangerous Business* and *The Rogue*. A single door opens up into the cabin.

The area of the docks around the three ships is patrolled by two groups of Dran Enterprises operatives,

The Other Kind of Winning

As always in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, keep an open mind to alternative ways to advance the story, and don't worry if the characters happen to lose an important fight. The face-off against the Dran Enterprises strike team is a tough encounter, and might not go the way the characters expect.

If the entire party is defeated or surrenders, Hoffman can order the characters to be kept alive and loaded onto a cart to be taken to Dran Enterprises for questioning. This won't see the characters taken directly to the company's main headquarters, but could provide an alternative means of reaching *Dangerous Business*. Once on that ship, one of the spies might mistakenly open the portal door leading to the Far Realm horror, with the strike team members alone dragged into that deadly trap to allow the characters to gain their freedom. See "Infiltrating Dran Enterprises" for more information.

each consisting of four **guards** and four **mastiffs**. Crates and equipment piled along the docks can provide cover, potentially allowing the characters to make a stealthy approach. Various booms and scaffolding can also grant access to the larger ships, from which the characters can work their way to *Dangerous Business*. The players might also devise any number of ways to talk their way on board. Dran Enterprises is often hiring, so the characters could pose as expert sailors or specialized consultants. Give the players and characters the freedom to develop a plan, gather information, and fail or succeed spectacularly!

If any of the guards see the characters as a threat, they shout out, raising the alarm and imposing one failure point. The alarm alerts all other guards on the docks, and can draw an endless supply of reinforcements from other ships over time. As such, the characters should realize quickly that a stand-up fight will involve more foes than they can handle.

The party can retreat and come back when the heat dies down, but this delay imposes another failure point. Or they can push past any threats to get to *Dangerous Business* and the portals within.

Portal Nexus

When the characters step through into the cabin on *Dangerous Business*, read:

> The small square cabin's interior is far larger than its exterior, opening up as an oval room thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. Crumpled on the floor before an iron door on the far side of the room, the body of a guard lies in a pool of blood. Standing closed between you and the body, six other oval-shaped iron doors are the only features in the room. Each door has a heavy latch that bears the insignia of Dran Enterprises, but no lock is visible. Above each of the iron doors, a differently shaped and colored glowing stone is set.

The characters can examine the dead guard or investigate the doors and stones. However, the amount of time they have to do so depends on whether they had other guards in pursuit. If the characters were pursued, give them a round or two to investigate the portal nexus, then have an increasing number of guards burst into the area each round, forcing the characters to enter a portal.

If the characters infiltrated the ship without raising the alarm, they have five minutes before they hear a guard patrol approaching. If they leave this area to go back onto the deck of *Dangerous Business* for any reason, they immediately attract the attention of nearby guards.

Dead Guard

The dead guard is a male half-orc. Lying on his chest is a black business card bearing unintelligible symbols. More notable is that the unfortunate guard's brain has been removed from his shattered skull. The guard was killed by the mind flayer leading the Six operatives (see "Portal 4" and later for more information). The condition of the guard's head makes it impossible to talk to him with *speak with dead*.

Aside from his grievous head wound, the guard's body is untouched except where his shirt is torn over his chest. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check confirms that a brooch or pin was ripped from that location. If a character thinks to check, the size of the round metal pin claimed from Hoffman after the fight with the Dran Enterprises strike team matches the size of the torn hole. (If the characters didn't claim the pin from the strike team and you haven't already arranged for a replacement to be found, this guard has a second pin in his pocket.)

Portal Doors

Each portal door is made of reinforced iron. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the doors are mundane, but that each is magically trapped. A *detect magic* spell or similar effect reveals an aura of evocation on a door's latch. If a latch is opened by anyone not wearing the round metal pin bearing the symbol of Dran Enterprises, the trap goes off. Each creature within the room must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) cold damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. Each trap can be disarmed with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check or a Dexterity check using thieves' tools.

Each of the seven doors has a glowing semiprecious stone above it, carved into a different shape: a green turquoise square, a red feldspar triangle, a white pearl circle, a purple amethyst oval, a blue aquamarine rectangle, a black hematite pentagon, and an orange tiger-eye hexagon. A *detect magic* spell reveals an aura of conjuration on the space beyond each door and on each of the stones.

The stones are coded markers indicating which doors lead to specific portals. That coding is changed regularly, with the portals reassigned to different locations and the stones swapped around to help keep their destinations a secret. As such, a portal still functions if its stone is removed, and a stone can be reattached to a door with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Placing a stone over a different door makes it harder for the operatives of the Six to know which doors they've already gone through as they make use of the portal network. Swapping one or more stones thus removes one of the party's failure points. If the players don't work out that the stones can be moved, a character infers this with a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

Treasure. If the stones are removed, they lose their magical properties but are worth 25 gp each.

Portal Encounters

Each portal door leads to a different encounter. Opening any door transports all characters in the portal nexus into the area beyond, with the entrance portal disappearing behind them. The characters must navigate the scene that takes place in the new location, then find an exit portal (another iron door identical to the doors in the nexus) to return to the portal nexus. (Portal 1 is an

exception, bringing the characters back automatically.) Eventually, the characters find the portal leading to Dran Enterprises' headquarters in this way.

As an advanced security measure, the magic of the portal network prevents a creature from gaining access to the headquarters on board *The Maverick* without a certain amount of experience traversing the network. As such, the first three portals the characters access will never lead to the headquarters.

The current destinations of the portals are noted on the Portals table. You can choose encounters you favor, or roll on the table to see where the characters end up, rerolling any locations already visited. For the first three destinations, roll a d6 to prevent the characters from reaching *The Maverick*. For subsequent destinations, roll a d8. Alternatively, you can allow the characters to reach the headquarters ship (see "On Board *The Maverick*" below) any time after they've returned from three other destinations.

With the exception of the Far Realm horror, the specific locations of portal encounters are not detailed here. If the characters ask about where they are in any given encounter, or if they're inclined to venture outside the encounter area, the choice of location is up to you.

Portals

d6 or d8	Portal
1	Far Realm horror
2	Guarded warehouse
3	Raging storm
4	Amid the rigging
5	Pirates versus zombies
6	River barge crossing
7–8	*The Maverick*

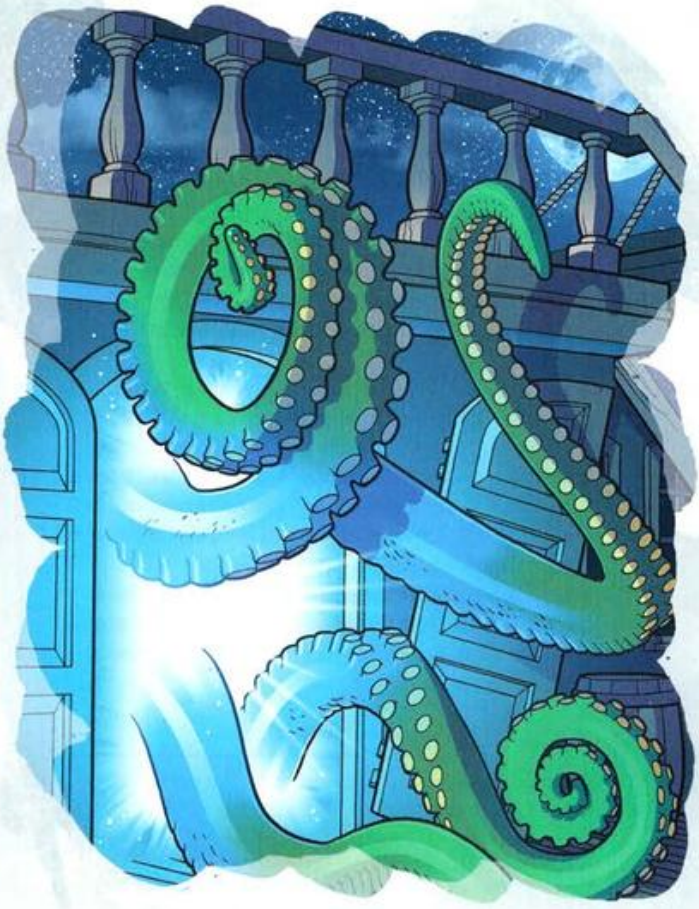
Just Cut to the End

If the players are particularly clever, they might come up with novel ways to shortcut the search for the headquarters portal. Perhaps they use *detect thoughts* on a Dran Enterprises operative who knows which stone currently marks the headquarters portal. Maybe exceptional role-playing allows them to talk an operative into using that portal while the characters watch. If this happens, the first time the characters try to use the headquarters portal, they are shunted back into the portal nexus.

Any Intelligence (Arcana) check made to read the portal's magic reveals that the way forward is blocked except to those with experience using the portal network. The characters must pass through three other portals first, but you can say that their attempts to access the headquarters portal have locked it down temporarily, preventing the Six from accessing it. Remove one failure point from the party's total.

Portal 1: Far Realm Horror

A month ago, an encounter with operatives of the Six led Dran Enterprises to try to fight that group using its own dark magic. Sadly, that attempt failed, and this portal now remains tied to a pocket dimension channeling the power of the Far Realm. Danger lurks on the other side of the door, whose stone has been marked as off limits for Dran Enterprises employees. If a character opens this door, read:



> As the portal opens, a pulse of magic draws you forward. The door vanishes and you stand within an impossible scene. The deck of a ship opens up around you, but the shifting sea to all sides is the color of bruised flesh, roiling beneath a clear sky filled with unfamiliar constellations. Suddenly the door to the ship's main cabin explodes out in a pulse of sickly ethereal light. With a horrid slurping sound, writhing tentacles spill forth through the open doorway and lash toward you.

This self-contained dimension is fueled by the power of the Far Realm. Planar instability prevents characters from moving beyond the immediate area of the deck (including jumping off the ship or fleeing belowdecks).

Creature. The mass of writhing tentacles is a Far Realm horror known as a **chaos quadrapod** (see appendix B). It uses its Chaos Cloud at the start of combat, then surges forward to lay into stunned characters. Each round, it focuses its grappling ability on whichever characters dealt it the most damage in the previous round.

If any part of the chaos quadrapod is pushed back through the door, it can be forced to return to its void of origin if the door is closed with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. If this happens, any creatures it has grappled are automatically released.

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As soon as the chaos quadrapod is killed or sent back through the door, the unstable magic of this portal draws the characters back to the portal nexus, giving them no time to explore the ship. However, a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the strange surroundings and the chaos quadrapod as products of the nightmarish Far Realm.

Portal 2: Guarded Warehouse

> As the portal opens, you feel a lurch as its magic wraps around you. The door is gone suddenly, and you are standing in a hot and humid warehouse filled with crates stacked to the ceiling. Windows high up on the walls let in light and reveal what look like tropical trees outside. The crates are organized in mazelike rows, making it hard to see how far the warehouse spreads. From somewhere to your right, you hear humming, running footsteps, and the squeak of a wheeled cart drawing closer.

Warehouse Worker. The guardian of this warehouse is Dagdra Deepforge (NG female dwarf), a long-time employee of Dran Enterprises. She has the iconic documancer feature (see "Iconic Faction Features" in appendix B) and uses the **priest** stat block with these changes:

- She wears half plate (AC 15).
- She has these racial traits: Her speed is 25 feet. She has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. She has advantage on saving throws against poison and resistance against poison damage. She speaks Common and Dwarvish.

Dagdra wears a tabard that is so worn that the bottom half of the image it bears is missing. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Religion) or Wisdom (Perception) check determines that the holy symbol of Moradin was once on the tabard, but only a bit of the flame remains. She pushes a cart loaded with Chultan-themed tourist keepsakes and collectibles. All bear the logo of Acquisitions Incorporated, but these are actually knock-offs created as part of Dran Enterprise's ongoing efforts to undercut Acquisitions Incorporated's reputation and success.

Dagdra has made a lot of bad choices in her life, from leaving her church to joining Dran Enterprises and getting stuck with warehouse duty. Her job mostly involves running from one row of crates to another, filling orders for customers and grouping them for retrieval by other Dran Enterprises employees. She receives her instructions through her documancy satchel.

If Dagdra notices intruders, she is startled and begins to call for help. The characters must either silence her, overcome her quickly, or convince her to hear their story. Fortunately, Dagdra is open to reconsidering her life choices and allegiances—and is having a really bad day. If the characters agree to help her complete her tasks, she reveals the location of the exit portal.

Lending a Hand. Helping Dagdra complete her tasks involves a specific process and a number of ability checks, all at DC 12. When an order comes in, it appears magically on Dagdra's ledger, three items at a time (see the Dagdra's List table below). The dwarf calls out the three items, and a character must make an ability check using one of the skills noted for an item to locate that item in the warehouse. Each check represents the act of either physically searching for the item or understanding the characteristics of the item. The narrow space between piles of crates means that only one character can search for each item.

Once three items are located with three checks, any character must then make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to place the three items in Dagdra's cart as the dwarf races around the warehouse.

The items are found and collected regardless of the success or failure of the checks. But if the characters fail three or more of the four checks necessary to collect a group of items, their lackluster performance causes a **bearded devil** productivity specialist to appear and attack the party (including Dagdra) for 1 round. The devil then vanishes, and the party gains a failure point.

Dagdra's List

Item	Ability Check
Chultan bold-tan body lotion	Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival)
Feathered "dino fury" handaxe	Strength (Athletics) or Intelligence (History)
Voodoo doll of Omin Dran	Intelligence (Arcana or Religion)
Lil' explorers first medicine kit (any item in the kit inflicts the poisoned condition if swallowed)	Wisdom (Medicine or Survival)
Guidebook to famous Chultan day spas (none of which exist)	Intelligence (History) or Charisma (Deception)
Jim Darkmagic's feral beast pacifying spray (incites rage in any beast exposed to the spray)	Wisdom (Animal Handling) or Charisma (Persuasion)
Triceratops action figure (has four or more horns)	Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Perception)
Genuine Batiri goblin pottery set (not at all genuine)	Intelligence (History) or Wisdom (Perception)
Môrgæn never-miss arrow set (always misses)	Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or Wisdom (Survival)
Acquisitions Incorporated t-shirt and underwear gift set	Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Charisma (Performance)
Donaar Blit'zen Chultan fibers floss kit	Intelligence (Nature) or Charisma (Persuasion)
Viari "swinging chandelier" diorama	Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Charisma (Persuasion)

Once all twelve items have been found, Dagdra leads the characters to a stack of crates that conceals the exit portal. Due to the standard Dran Enterprises enchantments placed upon her, she can't share any information about how to reach *The Maverick*. She stays behind to slack off for the rest of her shift, but might show up at some later point if you wish. Having decided to make a

Dagdra Deepforge

new life for herself, Dagdra makes an excellent potential employee for the franchise.

If the characters did not befriend Dagdra, they must search the endless maze of crates for the exit portal. This search can reveal the various products noted above (which the characters are free to steal and later resell using the shady business practice activity). Either way, unauthorized movement in the warehouse causes a **bearded devil** to appear and fight the characters until destroyed. Only then can the exit portal be found. The party gains one failure point as a result of the time they spent in the maze.

Portal 3: Raging Storm

> The moment you open the door, magic wraps around you, drawing you through the portal and into a raging storm. You stand on the deck of a ship that heaves from one side to the other as waves crash over the rails. Crew members pull lines and tie down cargo, as a heavyset, bearded captain calls out orders. Looking across the bow, you see tall spires of rock emerging through the storm—and the ship is headed straight toward them!

Captain Nuxoll (NG male human **veteran**) and the crew of the Dran Enterprises cargo vessel *Liar's Luck* are overwhelmed by the storm. Though they recognize at once that the characters are not in Dran Enterprises livery, they are in no mood for a fight and need any help they can get. The characters can determine what needs to be done on their own, or the captain or first mate twins Travis and Benham (both NG male half-elf **commoners**) can suggest useful actions.

Each of the tasks below involves one or more characters attempting specific ability checks to aid the ship's crew during the storm. All six checks must be attempted by the characters. The players can decide which characters make which checks, but a character cannot make a second check until all the characters have made one check. A character with the sailor background has advantage on these checks. If the characters fail three or more checks, the party gains one failure point.

Lower Main Sails. The storm's winds will shatter the mast if the sail can't be brought down, but its lines are tangled. A successful DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check is needed to reach the tangled lines, followed by a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to untangle them. A crew member named Streams (CG female halfling **commoner**) provides advice to any character attempting this task. A character who fails is tangled up and takes 3 (1d6) slashing damage.

Secure the Rum. Casks of rum are rolling around the decks, creating a short-term danger to the crew—and a longer-term danger to the crew's morale if too much of the rum goes overboard. A successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check helps first mates Travis and Benham secure the casks. If a character fails, they are slammed by an errant cask and take 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

Wave Lookout. The captain needs a sharp eye to call out when waves are about to strike the ship. An intern named Heian (LN female half-elf **commoner** wearing a shirt emblazoned with "Aeofel Lives") is currently on this duty, but she needs help. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check provides timely warning for the next set of waves. If the character's check fails, the next check made by any character to aid the ship is made with disadvantage.

Calm the Beast. A **tiger** being transported on the main deck in a large metal cage is frightened by the storm and trying to escape. Its keeper Bendari (N male elf **druid**) needs help. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check calms the tiger. Failure results in the tiger making one attack against the character through the bars of its cage.

Lift the Curse. A crew member named Incindorita (CN tiefling **acolyte**) claims that the ship has been cursed. They insist that one of the newcomers to the ship must offer up a prayer to calm the storm. There is no curse, but a character who succeeds on a DC 11 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check can go through the motions to calm Incindorita and inspire the crew.

Spot the Rocks. Captain Nuxoll needs someone to mark the distance and direction to the spires of rock along the shore, allowing the ship to pilot around them and to a calmer bay beyond. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check allows the ship to make a safe passage, or a character who succeeds on a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check can give the captain the confidence

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to navigate the treacherous waters. If the check fails, the ship shudders as it grinds against rocks, and each creature on board takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

Calmer Waters. After all six checks have been attempted, the ship passes through the storm. The crew hails the characters as heroes (or, if they failed, at least appreciates their attempt to help). Captain Nuxoll forgives the characters for infiltrating the Dran Enterprises portal network, and agrees to pretend that the crew never saw the party. He allows the characters access to the exit portal, which is located in his chamber.

While passing through the captain's chamber, the characters can clearly see a logbook filled with records of Dran Enterprises trade transactions, which is worth 250 gp to Acq Inc Head Office. A character can steal the logbook with a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. On a failed check, the captain and crew members spot and prevent the theft, and each character takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage from the beating they endure as they escape through the portal.

Portal 4: Amid the Rigging

> The moment you open the iron door, a tug of magic leaves you clinging shakily to a triangular foretop platform, high above the deck of a gently swaying cargo ship. From your vantage point forty feet above the deck, you can see dozens of crew members below. All wear the livery of Dran Enterprises, and most carry swords and crossbows. Rigging and rope ladders connect your platform to the crow's nest in the middle of the ship. Similar rigging connects the crow's nest to a platform at the aft of the ship. On that far platform, you see an iron door—the exit portal.

Out of sight of the ship's crew, the characters face no immediate threats but are nonetheless in a difficult predicament. The most obvious resolution is to try to cross the rigging in stages—first reaching the crow's nest, then continuing on to the aft platform and the exit portal.

At different points during the crossing of the rigging, the characters might attract the attention of crew members on the deck. The first time the characters are spotted, the party gains one failure point, and each character comes under attack by two crew members firing crossbows (use the **bandit** stat block). If the characters are spotted during the first stage of the trek across the rigging, the attacks repeat during the second stage, though no additional failure points are gained.

Reaching the Crow's Nest. Crossing the rigging requires a successful DC 13 group check using Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics). If at least half the characters succeed on the check, all the characters make it across unseen, with characters who failed checks being grabbed and aided by the other characters.

If more than half the characters fail the check, each character who failed slips from the rigging but manages to hang on. The characters must then succeed on a DC 12 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to prevent the commotion from drawing the attention of those below. If at least half the characters succeed, the party reaches the crow's nest unseen. If the check is a failure, crew members on the deck spot the characters.

> Big Daddy Donaar's Yum Yum Hut began as a braggadocious endeavor masterminded by one Donaar Blit'zen, when taking over the operations of the Dran & Courtier and attempting to rebrand for the night. Though the endeavor was an overall disaster, the brand remains unnervingly strong. Folks travel far and wide to sample Yum Yum Hut wares and merchandise. I yearn to know why.
>
> —Omin Dran

Crow's Nest. As the characters reach the crow's nest, have the two lead characters attempt DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) checks to spot Bardok the ship's cook (N male human **commoner**) currently lounging there. He wears an apron that reads "Big Daddy Donaar's Yum Yum Hut," which is the first thing visible if he is spotted. Bardok is too mellow to care about intruders, so that if the characters approach him carefully, they discover he's a big fan of Acquisitions Incorporated and is willing to help them out. The characters could instead handle Bardok in other ways, but if the initial Wisdom (Perception) checks are failed or Bardok is attacked, the startled cook cries out and alerts the crew.

Trade Route Maps. When the characters reach the crow's nest, even if they raised the alarm, they have time to look around. On the main deck below the crow's nest, a female elf dressed in green leather armor has been studying a map of the Sword Coast marked with trade routes. A number of other maps are stuffed into a backpack at the foot of the mast.

The characters can attempt to steal the backpack and the valuable trade route maps within. Doing so requires a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to reach a favorable position in the rigging, followed by a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to use some kind of rope-and-hook setup to hoist up the backpack. A *mage hand* cantrip can also be used to retrieve the pack, and the players might come up with other suitable ideas.

If the backpack is claimed, it holds maps worth 500 gp to Head Office. If only one of the checks succeeds, the characters still gain the maps but a crew member spots them if they are not already spotted. If neither check succeeds, the crew is alerted to the characters' presence if not already alerted, and each character comes under attack by two crew members firing crossbows (use the **bandit** stat block).

Aft Platform. Traversing the rigging and the rope ladders from the crow's nest to the aft platform requires another DC 13 group check using Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics). Once the characters reach the aft platform, they face one final barrage of attacks if they've been previously spotted. They can then step through the portal.

As the characters step through the portal, read the following, making adjustments as necessary if they have already seen the Six operatives:

Even as your group reaches the aft portal, you see another group appear through the foredeck portal. Five humans surround a tall, purple-skinned creature in black and purple robes—and which has four tentacles where its mouth should be. Oddly, those tentacles are tied together into a stylish handlebar mustache. The creature's companions fire arrows and swing down the rigging to do battle below. As your portal begins to close, the tentacled creature looks up to coldly watch you.

Choose one of the characters to receive a telepathic message from the mind flayer: "I will consume you and your companions. Your end comes soon." More information on this Six agent can be found in "On Board *The Maverick*" below.

Portal 5: Pirates Versus Zombies

Opening this door brings the characters into the middle of a battle with undead. Map 4.2 shows the setup of the dockside pirate fight.

As you open the iron door, the magic of the portal wraps around you, pulling you onto the stern of a large galleon. The door behind you vanishes as the noise of a raging battle rises. A horde of zombies surrounds a dozen Dran Enterprises pirates, who are fighting for their lives. The ship is moored at an old and decaying dock, with a single building visible against a forest of thick trees. In the trees beyond the building, you can see a freestanding iron door with the oval shape of a portal entrance.

No zombies are present on the land, though they swarm every part of the ship. One group of undead turns in unison in your direction as they spot you. Then a strong voice calls out as the ship's captain, wearing a flamboyant feathered hat and wielding a hammer decorated with seaweed, shouts to be heard. "Rally to me side, me crew! We fight still! Fight for our lives! No curse shall bring us down!"

The captain smashes a zombie with her hammer, then pulls a scroll from a satchel and reads words of power. A thunderous boom shatters the zombies around her, though more quickly press in. Several pirates call out: "Rally to Captain Torwyn!"

The ship's hard-fighting captain is Aela Torwyn (LN female dwarf **priest** with no remaining spell slots and the iconic documancer feature; see "Iconic Faction Features" in appendix B). She brought a curse down on her ship, the *Kraken's Lament*, when she found the hammer she wields. (That hammer uses the statistics for the priest's mace attack.) Dedicated to a dark god, the weapon causes those it slays to eventually rise as undead that seek their killer. Torwyn does not realize this, merely believing that some dark curse affects the ship.

Map 4.2: Pirate Fight

Creatures. The characters have an immediate problem with the group of six **zombies** that initially engage them in battle. Once those are defeated, other options present themselves.

Quell the Curse. Any character caught up in the zombie attack who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check sees that the undead are drawn to the dark glow of the captain's magic hammer. If Torwyn throws the hammer overboard into the sea, half the zombies follow it, reducing the forces the characters must face and ensuring the pirates gain the upper hand. However, convincing the captain requires a compelling argument and a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Keep a Low Profile. The characters can ignore the plight of the crew and work their way toward the docks and to the portal. This requires moving past three **zombies** and one **ogre zombie**, which are facing off against a lone pirate named Davena (N female human **bandit captain** with 12 hit points remaining). The characters can help Davena or they can sneak past and leave her to her doom with a successful DC 10 group Dexterity (Stealth) check. If the characters haven't made the connection between the hammer and the zombie attack, Davena can be overheard muttering about the curse, and how she's sure it's caused by the hammer Torwyn recovered from an old shipwreck.

Join In. The characters can rally to the captain while helping the crew. Pirates Fallinoor, Goldie, Whiskey, and Wemp (all human **berserkers** with 8 hit points re-

JARED BLANDO

maining) are trying to reach the captain but face twelve **zombies** in their way (or half that number if the hammer was abandoned). Defeating the zombies helps to unite the pirates, the characters, and the captain, so they can work more effectively against the horde.

Once they rally, the pirates and the captain working together destroy one zombie per round. The characters have advantage on attack rolls and ability checks, and the zombies have disadvantage on saving throws.

Aftermath. If the characters fought more than two groups of zombies but did not help the crew achieve victory, the party gains a failure point. If they stayed and helped the crew, Captain Torwyn thanks them effusively, and tells them that if they ever need a ship near Luskan, they can call on the *Kraken's Lament*. Once off the ship, the characters can easily reach the portal, then return to the portal nexus. If the characters ignored the pirates to head straight for the portal, remove one failure point from the party's total and have the characters think about their life choices.

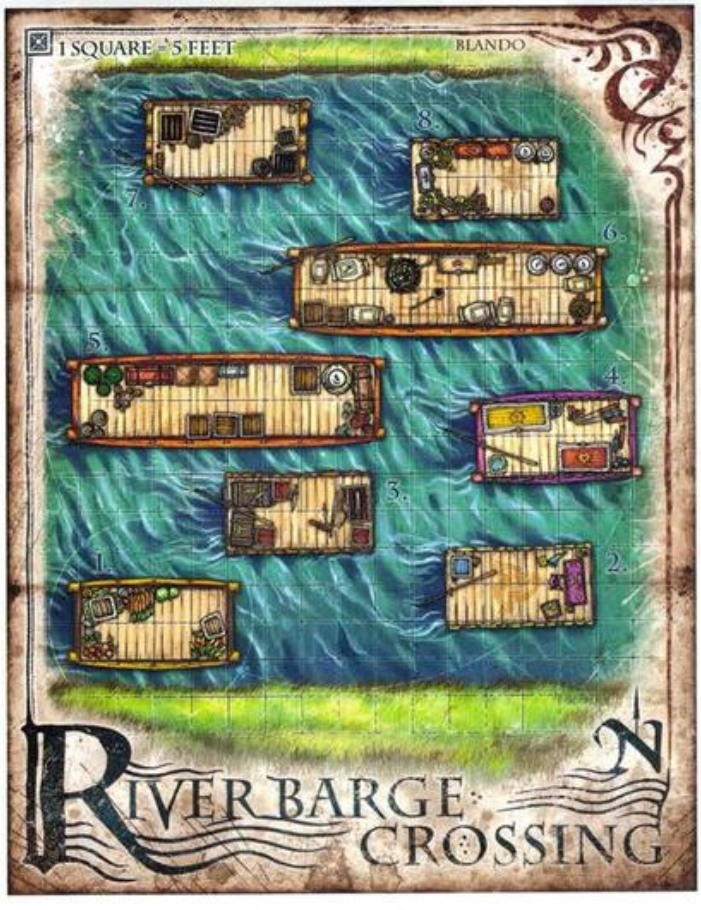
Treasure. In thanks, Torwyn and her crew offer the party a *wand of magic missiles*, a *+1 vicious rapier*, and a *rope of entanglement*. The rope is seemingly made of seaweed.

Portal 6: River Barge Crossing

This encounter brings the characters into direct contact with the operatives of the Six who are also traversing the portal network. Map 4.3 shows the initial setup of the river barge crossing.

Read the following, making adjustments as necessary if the characters have already seen the Six operatives:

> When you pull open the iron door, the view beyond shows another place—and you are suddenly there, the door disappearing behind you. A grassy slope leads down to the banks of a slow-moving river. A number of barges decorated in bright colors move up and down the river, bearing merchants crying out to attract customers. Those customers move from the river bank to the nearest barge, then carefully hop from barge to barge until they reach the merchant they want. On the opposite bank, you can see a small outhouse set with an oval iron door.
>
> A flash of light draws your attention to the right, where some fifty feet away from you, another group exits a portal that vanishes behind them. The group consists of five humans and a tall, purple-skinned creature. That creature's face has tentacles where its mouth should be—with those tentacles oddly tied into a stylish handlebar mustache. The creature wordlessly looks at two archers accompanying it, who draw their bows. Its three other companions break into a run toward the riverbank as the creature vanishes with a popping sound.



Map 4.3: River Barge Crossing

Roll initiative. Having seen the characters (or having seen them again), the mind flayer has used its *plane shift* ability to get back to the portal nexus. There, it prepares for the assault on the Dran Enterprises headquarters, leaving its lackeys to try to get to the outhouse portal before the characters. Of the four human **scouts** among the Six operatives, two stay behind and fire arrows at the party, while the other two scouts and a human **cult fanatic** race toward the barges.

The intention of the Six operatives is to cross the river barges as quickly as possible and reach the portal before the characters. The running scouts focus on crossing, though they use their shortswords against any character who jumps into the same or an adjacent barge. The cult fanatic races across the barges as well, but casts *spiritual weapon* as soon as possible. He then uses spells such as *command* or *hold person* on any character who gets a commanding lead.

The river is 85 feet wide and filled with 10-foot-wide barges. At the start of each round, a barge moves either left or right 1d4 × 5 feet, either drifting with the current or being poled against it. The movement of the barges adds an unpredictable element to the characters' attempts to get across the river.

Each barge holds a merchant and 1d4 − 1 customers, and all its area counts as difficult terrain. Characters in one barge can jump to a barge within 5 feet without an ability check. However, each barge is filled with different wares, so that some of the barges require checks by both the characters and the Six operatives to

Barge Contents

Barge	Merchandise	Complication
1	Produce	The barge contains nothing of note, but the first creature to cross it attracts the attention of a **giant poisonous snake** in the water. The snake surges onto a barge to attack and uses its swimming speed to follow the creature from barge to barge, continuing to attack until it is killed.
2	Fortune-teller	The fortune-teller asks for a donation. A character who drops one or more coins (no action required) gains advantage on their next d20 roll.
3	Weapons	A creature on the barge can find and purchase (or steal) any weapon in the *Player's Handbook* as an action. One of these finely crafted weapons grants advantage on the first attack roll made with it.
4	Fireworks	As an action, a character can use the fireworks to create a fire hazard for a pursuing creature. Any creature entering the barge must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) fire damage. (The Six operatives don't think to do this.)
5	Alchemist	A creature moving through this cramped barge must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or crash into a shelf and be doused in alchemical fluids and potion reagents. Roll a d4 to determine the equivalent potion effect: 1—*potion of diminution*, 2—*potion of growth*, 3—*potion of healing*, 4—*potion of poison*.
6	Hot Noodles	The cantankerous customers on this barge heave bowls of hot noodles at anyone pushing past them: +3 to hit; 4 (1d6 + 1) fire damage, and the character must make a Constitution saving throw at the end of each of its turns. On a failed save, the character takes the damage again. A successful saving throw ends the effect.
7	Monkeys and small pets	One of the many monkeys on this barge throws a banana peel at any character moving across it. The target must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.
8	Flowers	The florist becomes furious at any character moving across the barge, ordering that character to slow down and attempting to trip them. The character must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

successfully cross them. See the Barge Contents table for more information.

Characters are free to try to swim across the river, but doing so while avoiding the shifting barges requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check for each move made to swim. Any character in the water also attracts the attention of the **giant poisonous snake** from barge 1.

Between the characters and the Six, the first group to have half its members reach the riverbank wins the race and gets to the portal first. If the characters lose this race, the party gains a failure point.

On Board *The Maverick*

When the characters have traveled through three other portals, they are able to finally make their way through the portal leading to Dran Enterprises headquarters. This portal can conveniently be the next one the characters pick after returning from the third portal, unless you want to have the characters run through more portal encounters.

When the characters enter the headquarters portal, read:

> At last, you step through the iron door that leads into a palatial room on Dran Enterprises' headquarters ship. A placard on one richly polished wooden wall reads, "The Maverick." Two dazzling chandeliers, fine paintings, and lacquered chairs and tables set with gold trim decorate this opulent and expansive study. Large, curved windows to all sides reveal that you are below decks and far out at sea, the ship's wake extending behind it under clear skies. But you are not alone.

Who the characters find in this room depends on how well they navigated the portals. Total the failure points earned by the party and consult the following table.

Failure Points	Outcome
0–2	The characters arrive first
3	The characters and the Six operatives arrive at the same time
4 or more	The Six operatives arrive first

First to the Meeting

If the characters beat the Six operatives here, the only person in the room is a businesslike lizardfolk wearing a collar, a bow tie, and spectacles. Bracus (N **lizardfolk** with the iconic hoardsperson feature; see "Iconic Faction Features" in appendix B) studies the characters, touching his fingers to his chin as he invites them to introduce themselves. He then states his own name, confirming that he is in the employ of the unparalleled Dran Enterprises.

Bracus shares information with the characters, pausing to allow for questions and posing queries of his own. He's interested in what the characters encountered in the portal network, and responds favorably to any talk

Bracus

of assisting Dran Enterprises staff. He might ask what aspirations they have, or what it's like working for Omin Dran and Jim Darkmagic. Use the following points to guide the conversation:

- Bracus has been aware of the characters and their franchise since the first time any of them made use of the orrery components the party holds. (If the characters have not used any of the components, it's been the process of drawing them together that has enabled Bracus to get a sense of the party's activities through the orrery components in his possession.)
- Dran Enterprises normally views taking over failed Acquisitions Incorporated franchises as a sound investment decision, salvaging those franchises for parts and turning them into proper businesses. Nothing personal, of course.
- In response to talk of what brought the characters to him, Bracus says he understands how Acquisitions Incorporated might have come to believe that Dran Enterprises was responsible for the destruction of its franchises. Nothing could be further from the truth.
- The true culprit is an enigmatic group known as the Six. They seem to be linked to dark gods and the Far Realm. Dangerous stuff.
- The Six came into the possession of the *far gear* just over a year ago—one of the components of the *Orrery of the Wanderer*. Operatives of the Six are now actively seeking the orrery's other components, hoping to rebuild it for some dark ritual. But Bracus believes that even recovering a few components could be enough for the Six to accomplish their goals.
- In an attempt to foil the Six, Dran Enterprises secured two of the orrery's components—the *chronolometer* and the *dimensional loop*. Dran Enterprises also knows that the last unclaimed component, known as the *wheel of stars*, has been securely stored in the northern holdfast known as Horn Enclave, and is under the protection of the dwarves who dwell there.
- Bracus is aware that the Six are attempting to gain access to the headquarters portal, and suspects they will arrive at any moment.

Bracus takes the characters' measure during the conversation. However, as long as the characters stop short of killing the lizardfolk immediately, the imminent appearance of the Six convinces him that the enemy of his enemy is now his friend. Reaching into his hoardsperson *living loot satchel*, Bracus retrieves the *chronolometer* and the *dimensional loop*. He then offers both to the characters in exchange for them defending him when the Six operatives arrive—as they do only moments later. See "Operatives of the Six" below for more information on the fight with the mind flayer Szorrulax and its minions.

Right on Time

If the party arrives at the same time as the Six, roll initiative! Szorrulax prioritizes killing Bracus during the fight, forcing the characters to try to save the Dran Enterprises employee. If Bracus is killed, Szorrulax flees with his *living loot satchel* and the orrery components at once. If the characters save Bracus, defeat the Six operatives, and force Szorrulax to flee, they gain the components and the information noted above. If Bracus dies, they might still find a valuable book and some treasure, as described below.

Unfashionably Late

If the Six operatives arrive at the headquarters first, Szorrulax easily defeats and kills Bracus. When the characters arrive, Szorrulax is claiming Dran Enterprises' two components, having destroyed the lizardfolk's *living loot satchel* to empty its contents. Roll for initiative, but Szorrulax's first act is to *plane shift* away.

All is not lost, though. Once the characters defeat the remaining foes, they can investigate the cabin. In the spilled contents of Bracus's satchel, they find a book entitled *Great Dwarven Halls*, with a page turned down. It mentions the dwarves of Horn Enclave as being noted for their work of securing items of great value. Written in the margin is the note: "The wheel of stars, hidden by its creator." They also find the treasure noted below, since Szorrulax doesn't have the time to take it.

Operatives of the Six

Szorrulax is the **mind flayer** the characters might have previously seen in the portal network. It has the iconic secretarian feature (see "Iconic Faction Features" in appendix B) and braids its tentacles together into a handlebar mustache. If Szorrulax kills anyone, it immediately drops a black business card set with unintelligible symbols onto the body as a calling card.

Accompanying the mind flayer are the Six operatives who survived the portal 6 encounter (originally four

scouts and one **cult fanatic**). If all those foes were killed in that encounter, Szorrulax has two **bandits** with it—a pair of guards held back from previous encounters, and who are now the last survivors of the Six's forces.

In battle, Szorrulax uses Mind Blast on as many characters as possible, making sure that Bracus is in the blast if the lizardfolk is alive. The mind flayer prioritizes killing Bracus before turning to other targets, but it has no interest in a fair fight. It uses *plane shift* to escape if it can seize the components or if it is badly wounded, leaving its lackeys behind to deal with the characters.

Treasure

In addition to the book, the study holds 30 pp, 150 gp, two pieces of pink coral (100 gp each), a small gold bracelet (50 gp), five *+2 arrows* decorated with green flames, a *dagger of venom*, an *immovable rod*, and two *potions of greater healing*. Bracus gifts all this to the characters if they save him, or they can loot it if things go the other way.

Getting Away

When the fight is done, the characters can exit through the portal, return to the portal nexus, and leave *Dangerous Business*. If they want to explore *The Maverick* first, that enormous ship is crawling with elite Dran Enterprises operatives (use the **veteran** stat block), all of whom know to kill intruders on sight.

Szorrulax

The Six? Don't waste my time with fables. Yeah, there are people who don't like Acq Inc. People with grudges. People with axes to grind. But they're not some sort of ... I don't know, cult or gang or whatever.

How am I so sure? Because I've been in this from the beginning. Do you have any idea what I know? What I've seen? The hits I've taken for Acquisitions Incorporated? If there were a cabal of subtle masterminds working the shadows, cunningly plotting the downfall of Acq Inc, they would have definitely recruited me by now.

—Viari

If Bracus is alive, all Dran Enterprises personnel have been magically ordered to allow the characters to leave the Luskan docks unharmed. If such a message is not received, the guards on the boat and the docks react badly to the party's appearance, and the characters must sneak, talk, or fight their way to safety. Once away from the docks, the characters can lie low for as long as necessary, then depart Luskan.

Conclusion

With their exciting portals-based adventures in Luskan done, the characters attain 5th level! Just as importantly, they've learned that Dran Enterprises isn't the real villain behind the attacks on Acquisitions Incorporated franchises. If the characters spoke to Bracus or obtained the book from the lizardfolk's satchel, they also have a solid lead indicating that Horn Enclave holds the final orrery component. If they failed to talk to Bracus and have not yet deciphered the book, see "Enter Flabbergast" in the next episode to bring them up to speed.

When the characters complete the journey from Luskan back to their headquarters, they find their half-orc majordomo in a great mood.

Gilda Duhn is all tusks, grinning from ear to ear. "I just heard word from Head Office! The bosses have been watching how well you run the business, and your mission in Luskan is all anyone is talking about! Our license has been expanded to cover a broader territory around Phandalin! And even better, I've been crunching the profit statements, and I think we're ready to expand this headquarters!"

Franchise Advancement

As the characters attain 5th level, the franchise attains rank 2! You and the players should all spend some time in the "Franchise Advancement" and "Company Positions" sections of chapter 2 to read up on the exciting improvements for the franchise, for its headquarters, and for the characters as their company positions yield even more powerful benefits.

DARREN M. A. CALVERT

Franchise Headquarters Upgrades

All the characters' hard work and luck to date is about to pay off in the form of headquarters upgrades! The "Franchise Advancement" section in chapter 2 has details of the cosmetic, expansion, transportation, and weapon options available to the characters for their headquarters. The available upgrades can cover literally any features that you and the players decide on, but always keep in mind the ways in which the events and developments of the adventure might drive those upgrades.

For example, the expansion option available to the headquarters might amount to simply digging out more space beneath Tresendar Manor. But it also might arise as a result of the franchise moving its headquarters to the Silent Sound lighthouse—or even claiming both sites as a joint headquarters. That latter option is even easier to set up if the characters' possession of the orrery and its components allows them to channel teleportation magic into their headquarters as their transportation option.

Hiring Staff

At rank 2, the franchise gains four additional untrained hirelings and one skilled hireling, allowing the characters to hire new staff to meet their needs. Such hires can be done in-character if the players enjoy those kinds of scenes—and the franchise could even set up a job fair for potential employees at a local market or tavern. If the characters have made any allies or hired NPCs during preceding episodes, those NPCs might be taken on as official staff members at this time. This is also an excellent time to bring in an NPC the characters enjoyed interacting with, making that character an official part of the franchise family.

Crew. In addition to staff, ten crew are hired to help with the franchise. In addition to working on the upkeep of the franchise headquarters, these NPCs might be part of the team necessary to operate a mobile headquarters (sailors for a sailing ship or airship, arcane engineers for a walking statue or teleporting tavern, and so forth).

Making Franchise Advancement Rewarding

Advancing a franchise is meant to be a major accomplishment for the players and their characters. This is a moment to celebrate and reward the party's deeds and to help the players get excited about designing and selecting their franchise upgrades. Some players might focus on mechanics, while others enjoy the creativity of dreaming up how a franchise headquarters looks and feels. There is no wrong way to approach the process.

Headquarters customization is deliberately open-ended to allow for creativity. This might create some work for you as the DM, since you adjudicate the characters' customization choices. A good rule of thumb is to allow the players full creative freedom while sticking to the mechanics (however loose) presented by the rules in chapter 2. If the characters want their headquarters to be a giant bouncing rubber ball, let them go for it! In the end, that option can still make use of the general idea and mechanics of a walking statue headquarters, even if the description of the headquarters' appearance and movement is vastly different.

Once the characters are done planning their upgrades, Gilda the majordomo takes over the mundane task of hiring contractors and starting construction. The length of time it takes for upgrades to be completed is up to you, but one to two months is reasonable. During that period, the characters have plenty of opportunity to engage in downtime activities and franchise tasks.

Franchise Downtime

During the break between episode 4 and episode 5, the characters are likely to be focused on deciding their next move. The urgency of seeking out the final orrery component at Horn Enclave depends on whether the party successfully claimed the two components held by Dran Enterprises, or whether they watched the mind flayer Szorrulax vanish with the components in hand. Moreover, knowing that the Six are behind the attacks on Acquisitions Incorporated, the characters can learn everything Head Office knows about that faction—but what is known about the Six amounts to little more than rumors and their somewhat-trademark-infringing logo. You can tease any of the information from "Factions and Rivals" in chapter 3 as you see fit.

Since the characters are now running a rank 2 franchise, they can assign two franchise tasks to be run by staff in addition to any personal downtime activities they wish to engage in. If those downtime activities or franchise tasks involve actively seeking connections to and information about Horn Enclave, that information can be revealed in any number of ways.

All the activities mentioned in this section are introduced or talked about in the "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" section in chapter 2.

The Road to Horn Enclave

Characters or staff engaging in the research, marketeering, or scrutineering activities can uncover all kinds of connections to the dwarven Clan Horn and its fabled fortress. The characters might connect with customers or allies who know of caravans that make regular runs to the enclave, or who have heard rumors about local nobles or mages who have left relics there to be safeguarded.

The carousing activity can bring the characters into closer contact with merchants or nobles connected to Horn Enclave. One of those is a company called Dhargun Ironworks, who are sending a caravan to the enclave within the next month for the unlikely purpose of celebrating a wedding. Episode 5 has much more information on the Dhargun wedding—and the unique opportunity it offers for the characters to gain access to the enclave.

You can use the following guidelines to give the characters a quick overview of Horn Enclave. And as they learn about the enclave, they'll also discover its storied and problematic (for them) connections to Acquisitions Incorporated:

- Horn Enclave is a dwarven stronghold run by the wealthy shield dwarves of Clan Horn.

Airship Attack by the Six

- Lady Kira Horn and Lord Zardak Horn head the clan. Rizwin Horn is their daughter, and the public face of the enclave. Ironbeard is the enclave's head mage.
- The dwarves of Horn Enclave are no friends to Acquisitions Incorporated. During a prior visit to/incursion of/assault against Horn Enclave by Acquisitions Incorporated, a number of regrettable incidents occurred.
- Those incidents may or may not have included impersonation, mendaciousness, and violence.
- Also, there was a major theft from the enclave's vaults.
- And there was a thing about threatening Ironbeard. And sleeping with Rizwin, then stealing Rizwin's jewelry under the pretense of wanting to remember her ... it's a long list, actually.

If the characters double down on research, you can share additional specific details from the "Horn Enclave" section of episode 5 if you like. This might include information on residents and guards, gaining access to the hold, the general workings of its vaults, and so forth.

Continuing the Adventure

The more the characters learn about Horn Enclave, the stronger their understanding that getting inside will be a difficult task for most—and an impossible task for anyone openly connected to Acquisitions Incorporated. Thankfully, Head Office has some assistance it can offer in that regard as the characters plan their incursion!

Episode 5: Hide and Seek

The characters (now 5th level) know that Horn Enclave is the hiding place of the last unclaimed clockwork component of the *Orrery of the Wanderer*, called the *wheel of stars*. They also know that Horn Enclave is all but impossible to get into. Thankfully, Acquisitions Incorporated has the party's back.

With the help of Acq Inc fixer Flabbergast, the characters make use of a unique ritual that lets them swap bodies with a group of dwarves heading to the enclave for a wedding. This gives the characters access to the vaults, but the deception creates complications as they struggle with the deep secrets of their possessed dwarves and must try to keep the wedding on track.

Accessing the orrery component vault reveals valuable information from the clockwork creatures that guard the vault. But the characters are ultimately chagrined to discover that the component isn't there, with the vault set up as a ruse to distract anyone attempting to rebuild the orrery. Still, the orrery's creator—a wizard named Lottie—wishes to meet anyone savvy enough to have come this far, provided they share her interest in ensuring that the orrery's power is never used.

Traveling in style in a borrowed battle balloon, the characters journey to Lottie's sanctum in the Greypeak Mountains. But en route, the franchise is intercepted by airships belonging to the Six. The characters get

DARKEN

their first glimpse of Splugoth the Returned, one of the Six's mysterious members, and the point goblin for the plan to claim the orrery. In fact, the attack is only a distraction, providing cover for an attempt to steal the orrery housing and the components the characters have obtained.

Continuing across the Greypeaks, the characters reach the ruined town of Fortune and the casino resort known as Lottie's Palace. There, they discover that Lottie is a lich whose exclusive retreat holds secrets and deadly threats in equal measure. With no hope of winning a fight against Lottie and her numerous lich allies, the battle must be one of wits as the characters attempt to convince her to help Acquisitions Incorporated, tell the orrery's origin story, and provide the final orrery component.

Enter Flabbergast

While the characters sought out information on Horn Enclave, word of their investigations reached Head Office. Alternatively, if the characters couldn't figure out the connection between the orrery and the enclave, word of that mystery reaches Head Office instead. Either way, the characters receive an unexpected visitor, offering some unexpected assistance.

> Standing before you is a tall, smooth-headed male human with a neatly trimmed black beard, dressed in pressed business attire. He pauses from writing in his ledger to look up at you. His eyes narrow as if evaluating you. At his feet is a calico cat wearing a monocle and a horned helmet. The cat is busy licking itself but pauses to look at you. It also narrows its eyes.
>
> "I am Flabbergast, gentlepersons," the figure says. "In the employ of Acquisitions Incorporated's Head Office, and at your service." He gestures down to the cat. "This is Mister Snibbly. We need to talk. It's about your mission."

Flabbergast, wizard and majordomo to Head Office (see appendix A), has been dispatched to assist the characters with the goal of gaining the final orrery component from Horn Enclave. Mister Snibbly has no agenda, beyond making it clear that he thinks the characters leave much to be desired. If the characters haven't yet figured out that the enclave is where the component is stored, Flabbergast can fill in the missing bits of what they know, all the while chiding the characters for missing important clues. If the characters haven't yet heard about the Dhargun Ironworks caravan's imminent trip to Horn Enclave (see "Dhargun Ironworks" below), he can relay that information as well.

Flabbergast can also provide or reinforce the backstory regarding Acquisitions Incorporated's well-known incursion of the enclave. In response to any discussion of that past mission, the wizard sums up the party's position as follows:

> "As you might well guess, gentlepersons, infiltrating Horn Enclave by traditional means would be difficult at best. And if you were discovered, then your status as agents of Acquisitions Incorporated would place you in grave peril. Though likely not for long." Flabbergast sighs. Mister Snibbly spits up a hairball in disgust. "The dwarves of Clan Horn would kill you immediately, is what I'm saying. As such, Omin Dran has requested that I offer my assistance. Have you ever heard of the *ritual of astral transmogrification*?"

The characters will not have heard of the legendary ritual Flabbergast names, which has long been lost to history. Its magic allows characters to enter a dream-like state, leaving their bodies safely behind while their souls temporarily possess other bodies. Flabbergast explains that the ritual's creator died long ago, and its components are now unknown. But if the characters can help him determine and track down those components, Flabbergast can provide them the perfect means to infiltrate the dwarven stronghold. By taking possession of some other group with legitimate business in the enclave, the characters can wander its vaults at their leisure without arousing suspicion. Well, maybe just a little suspicion. But it'll all be fine.

Seeking the Ritual

You decide what form the ritual's components might take, from ancient verses and arcane inscriptions, to rare herbs and alchemical reagents, to any other obscure bit of magical paraphernalia in between. You also decide how much time and what specific effort is necessary for the characters and Flabbergast to determine and track down those components. This might involve short side quests of your own devising, or having NPCs conveniently turn out to be a source of some components. The Splintfig sisters from episode 2 are good candidates, as is Hoobur Gran'Shoop if the party stayed on good terms with the psychopathic gnome.

If the characters take more downtime to seek out the ritual's components, they might use marketeering to find customers or brokers of magical supplies and rare spell components. The shady business practice activity could alternatively turn up connections to those who dabble in more dangerous and secretive magic.

Does Anyone Have a Better Idea?

This episode assumes that the characters make use of Flabbergast's ritual to enter Horn Enclave, but the information presented on the enclave is easily adaptable to other approaches. As such, the players and characters are absolutely free to come up with other methods of seeking the final orrery component. Even though the dwarves of Clan Horn remain furious at Acquisitions Incorporated and the enclave's defenses are formidable, the players should always have the last say regarding the characters' actions.

Workable alternatives include such plans as the characters secreting themselves aboard the Dhargun

Ironworks caravan, posing as last-minute wedding guests, or masquerading as others making a vault deposit. They might attempt to convince the guards that their appointment time was somehow overlooked, pay someone off to learn the song of the day that is the password into the enclave, or any other plan they dream up.

If another plan is hatched, Flabbergast successfully seeks out the components for the astral transmogrification ritual by himself, strictly as a backup plan for the characters. He's been ordered to journey to the enclave with the party and watch over the operation, and provides one of the characters with a small stone token bearing the symbol of Acquisitions Incorporated.

If the characters need the ritual performed in an emergency, they can activate the token by speaking the command word "Whippoorwill." Flabbergast then uses a crystal ball to locate them and perform the ritual. By possessing the bodies of dwarf guards and Clan Horn operatives, the characters should be able to successfully defend their own magically slumbering bodies and get them out of the enclave safely. And possessing the token also puts the characters in a position where the ritual might be cast accidentally if they don't use it to enter the enclave, strictly for your amusement.

Traveling to Horn Enclave

The Dhargun Ironworks caravan bound for Horn Enclave is set to reach the main gates in the morning, then depart again that evening. With the characters able to enter the enclave in the bodies of the caravan's wedding party, they can locate the vault, secure the orrery component, and leave when the caravan departs at the end of the day. Should be easy, right?

With their mobile headquarters, the characters should have a straightforward time traveling from Phandalin to the mountains northeast of Silverymoon. Or if the players are dying for some action, you can use wandering monsters to liven the journey up. Once close enough, the characters can set their franchise down in a safe location away from prying eyes, then approach the wide dirt road leading to Horn Enclave. From the safety of cover alongside the road, Flabbergast casts his ritual when the Dhargun Ironworks caravan is spotted. See "Flabbergast's Ritual" in the "11:00 AM" section below.

Dhargun Ironworks

The challenges in this section of the adventure arise from the goals of the caravan members and how they intersect with those of the characters. Once Flabbergast's ritual is activated, each character possesses one of the NPCs in the caravan. However, each NPC has a secret goal that remains dormant until the goal is triggered during a specific scene. When the secret is triggered, the DM tells the player the secret and informs them that their character is compelled to fulfill that secret goal. For maximum entertainment value, wait until the triggering scene to tell the players about any secret goals.

The Caravan

The caravan is made up of three horse-drawn carriages and bears sixteen dwarves to Horn Enclave for a wedding that will unite the Dhargun and Thunderwind clans. Both dwarven families are quite different, with the Dharguns favoring commerce and the Thunderwinds dedicated to warfare. But the unlikely love between Gwendolyn Dhargun and Tannus Thunderwind has brought them together.

The reason for holding the wedding at Horn Enclave is that the caravan also bears valuable gifts provided by both families, which will be placed in a vault until Gwendolyn and Tannus complete their honeymoon and decide where they'll spend their lives as a couple. (The pressure from both families to choose one clan over the other is huge.) Gifts include furniture, art pieces, and other large items, along with adamantine bars worth 5,000 gp, a suit of *+1 mithral half plate* inscribed with the insignia of Dhargun Ironworks, and a *belt of dwarvenkind* bearing the insignia of the Thunderwind Clan.

Wedding Guests

Each of the guests in the wedding party is a dwarf, including the happy couple, their family members and wedding party attendants, and various retainers to both clans. Except for Rala, each guest uses the NPC stat block noted below with the following racial traits:

- Their speed is 25 feet.
- They have darkvision out to a range of 60 feet.
- They have advantage on saving throws against poison and resistance against poison damage.
- They speak Common and Dwarvish.

You should familiarize yourself with the key NPCs detailed below. Any of the information that isn't secret can be shared with characters when they first possess an NPC through Flabbergast's *ritual of astral transmogrification*.

Gwendolyn Dhargun. Gwendolyn (LG female dwarf **veteran**) is the cherubic overseer of Dhargun Ironworks, having recently taken over from her aging mother, Amara. Gwendolyn is an excellent metallurgist and runs the business with superb aplomb. She worries that her professional success overshadows her betrothed, Tannus, who until recently was a raving barbarian bent only on war. She believes that Tannus has changed. Her goal is to convince him that she believes in him and is proud of the person he has become. Gwendolyn carries no weapons with her for the wedding.

Gwendolyn's secret revolves around wanting to prove that she believes that Tannus has truly changed, but that she still respects his past. During the celebration, she asks Thoman, her family's head of security, to go to the vault and bring out the suit of armor as a gift to her husband.

Tannus Thunderwind. Tannus (CG male dwarf **berserker**) is a reformed barbarian. His only love used to be the battlefield, but that changed when he met Gwendolyn. Everything about her was peaceful, tranquil, and better than him. He has since sworn to give up violence, become a partner to Gwendolyn, and help grow the ironworks. His goal is to convince Gwendolyn's family that he is good enough for her, and that he has given up his violent ways. Tannus carries no weapons with him for the wedding.

Tannus's secret involves wanting to prove himself to Gwendolyn. He must abstain from violence all day long, no matter what happens.

Rala Dhargun. Rala (NG female dwarf spy, to all appearances) is Gwendolyn's cousin, lifelong best friend, and attendant of honor for the wedding ceremony. Having lived a life of adventure herself, she is supportive of Gwendolyn marrying someone different. She stays at Gwendolyn's side, encouraging her and ensuring that she has a wonderful day. Rala carries a shortsword as well as a set of thieves' tools and mason's tools.

Rala's secret is that she isn't actually Rala. The dwarf was recently kidnapped and is currently held by agents of the Zhentarim. This version of Rala is a **doppelganger** on a secret mission to steal the *belt of dwarvenkind*, which the Zhentarim plan to sell to an eager buyer. Rala's plan is to pickpocket the vault key held by Gorat, one of Tannus's attendants. She'll then access the vault while everyone is having drinks in the tavern. One of the gift boxes present at the celebration has her crossbow hidden within.

Rescuing the true Rala might make an interesting side quest for further development, depending on how and if the characters interact with the dwarves in the wedding party.

Amara Dhargun. Amara (NG female dwarf **bandit captain**) is Gwendolyn's mother—a crotchety old dwarf with serious doubts regarding Tannus Thunderwind. However, Amara loves her daughter and is willing to trust her judgment. She carries no weapons at the wedding.

Amara's secret concerns a pledge to ensure that her daughter's marriage goes off without a hitch. If anything gets in the way of a successful ceremony, she plans to cut that thing to pieces with a family heirloom battleaxe that she's hidden inside a gift box present at the celebration. (The battleaxe uses the same statistics as the bandit captain's scimitar attack.)

Thoman Dhargun. Thoman (LN male dwarf **priest**) is head of security for Dhargun Ironworks. He cares little for weddings or love. All that stuff just gets in the way of business and creates security risks. Thoman carries a warhammer that uses the same statistics as the priest's mace attack.

Thoman's secret involves his professional devotion to Amara. To make sure nothing goes wrong with the ceremony that might upset Gwendolyn's mother, he plans on checking the vault while Gwendolyn and Tannus are saying their vows, and must report any disturbances or thefts.

Gorat Thunderwind. Gorat (CN male dwarf **berserker**) is Tannus's cousin and oldest friend, and bears many scars from the battles they've fought together. He loves battle still, and is struggling to understand and support Tannus's change of heart and mind. Gorat carries no weapons for the wedding, but he's resourceful enough to turn anything he grabs into a weapon. Such improvised weapons use the normal berserker attack statistics.

Gorat's secret involves his goal to deliver a toast during the dining hall celebration that will call Tannus to battle, to see once and for all whether his friend has changed. Gorat does not do this out of malice, but out of love. He wants to ensure that his friend is on the proper path.

Jormun Thunderwind. Jormun (NG male dwarf **priest**) is Tannus's father, and will conduct the ceremony to marry his son to Gwendolyn. He carries a warhammer and a shield.

Jormun's secret involves relief that his son has changed his ways. Though he has not confessed this to anyone, he hopes that Tannus can leave his days of battle behind and find love and peace with Gwendolyn. If a battle breaks out, Jormun stands by Tannus or Gwendolyn (whoever is in greater danger).

Other Guests. Nine other dwarves representing both families have come to see the wedding—and to underline the fact that the two families really don't trust one another. The Dharguns see the Thunderwinds as uncouth and violent, while the Thunderwinds see the Dharguns as uppity and boring. None of the guests carry weapons, for the safety of all attending.

Character-Building Exercise

If the characters use an alternative plan to gain access to Horn Enclave, they might not play out the NPCs' secret agendas. However, these secrets can still be relevant factors in the episode. While the characters are in Horn Enclave, they will likely interact with members of the wedding party, and might even be invited to join the festivities or ride in the caravan when the group departs. At opportune moments, an NPC might befriend a character and ask them for help with their secret goal. And, of course, if things start going badly at any point, the characters can say "Whippoorwill" into the stone token given to them by Flabbergast to have him perform the ritual—or they might have the ritual cast for them whether they want it or not. See "Ironbeard's Entrance" in the "11:15 AM" section of the wedding itinerary for more information.

Horn Enclave

Horn Enclave is a legendary dwarven stronghold run by Clan Horn, wealthy shield dwarves whose estates and holds spread across the Spine of the World mountains. The enclave's business is the leasing of secure vaults to wealthy patrons, with nigh-impregnable defenses designed to keep each vault's contents safe from thieves. Map 5.1 shows the layout of Horn Enclave.

Within the Enclave

Horn Enclave is a fully inhabited living space, workshop, and stronghold.

Residents. The enclave is home to more than one hundred dwarves, with nearly half of those working as guards. Clan Horn is led by Lady Kira Horn and Lord Zardak Horn. Zardak is getting on in years, nearly blind, and increasingly defers to Lady Kira's decisions. Rizwin Horn, their daughter, is a capable diplomat and negotiator who greets all guests to the enclave. The head mage for the enclave is a dwarf known as Ironbeard, responsible for security and charged with inspecting all deposits to the vaults. (The stat blocks to be used for these NPCs are found when they first appear in the adventure.)

Layout. The Horn Enclave map shows the layout of the fortress and its described locations. Guest quarters are located in the northwest, near the tavern. The vaults are located to the northeast. The chambers of the enclave's lady and lord are located to the east, beyond the great halls. To the south stand residences, forges, and the enclave's temple.

Entrance. Entrance to the hold is through a long passage secured by four sets of portcullises and by fortified doors. The doors are opened by iron golems, who do so only when they hear a set of bagpipes play the song of the day that is the passphrase into the enclave. A dwarf outside the main doors plays this song each time an approved caravan arrives. The doors lead to the Hall of War, a large room containing a terrifying construct—the aptly named slaughterstone eviscerator—ready to defend the enclave in times of need. See the "11:15 AM" section of the wedding itinerary for more information.

Guards. Scores of dwarf **guards** can be called upon to defend the enclave, with most occupying the barracks adjoining the vaults. Patrols are infrequent due to the overall security level of the enclave, but a group of four guards is dispatched if an attempt to pick a vault's locks is detected. If the guards find trouble they can't handle, they summon more guards and raise a general alarm, summoning Ironbeard, Rizwin, Lady Kira, or Lord Zardak. In true emergencies, Ironbeard activates the slaughterstone eviscerator in the Hall of War (see the "11:15 AM" section of the wedding itinerary).

Alarm Response. If an alarm is raised, the dwarves cordon off sections of the enclave by accessing levers in hidden chambers, each of which drops a portcullis along a major hallway. The lever chamber north of the Hall of War controls the main gates and the two portcullises north of the Hall of War. The lever chamber east of the forge controls the portcullis south of the Hall of War. The lever chamber west of the war room controls two portcullises east of the dwarven residences. Other defenses are noted in relevant sections of the episode.

Vaults. Details of the famed vaults of Horn Enclave are provided in the "11:15 AM" section of the wedding itinerary.

Wedding Itinerary

The Wedding Itinerary table provides an overview of the day's events, which are part of your recipe for hilarity and disaster. At the appointed times, guests move from one location to another and begin a specific event. If an NPC has a secret, it activates during the appropriate event. Take the player of an NPC aside and inform them of their secret goal, and explain that the importance of the goal to the body they inhabit means that they are compelled to try to accomplish this goal. Players can share their secret goal with other individual players once they learn it, as long as sharing it would not contradict that goal. For example, the player running Gwendolyn should not share their goal with the player running Tannus, because the whole point is for Gwendolyn to surprise her new husband with the gift. Likewise, the player running Rala does not share her goal with anyone having an interest in what's in the vaults.

In any free time between events, or by sneaking away from events, the characters can try to realize their primary goal of finding the final orrery component. The time of each event in the itinerary is known to all members of the caravan, so the characters can plan when to perform their heist. Of course, the secret goals of the wedding guests might impact those plans.

Unlike a typical dungeon infiltration, the layout of the enclave is not as important as the itinerary. Players are not expected to turn this into a dungeon crawl, if only because Horn Enclave is teeming with guards and other dwarves. Any wedding guests seen in private chambers or away from the events of the wedding itinerary are given a warning the first time, then questioned more carefully and searched each time thereafter. Evidence of theft or other lawbreaking could result in a guest being supervised by a guard until the caravan departs.

If the dwarves of Horn Enclave somehow find out that the characters are members of Acquisitions Incorporated, permanent incarceration or execution are among the best possible outcomes. Ideally, the players coming up with hilarious ways to escape will allow them to prevent such fates. Even if the characters have not used Flabbergast's ritual, it should be clear to them that pay-

Wedding Itinerary

Time	Event	Summary
11:00 AM	The caravan arrives at Horn Enclave.	Flabbergast performs the ritual, or the characters can otherwise infiltrate the stronghold.
11:15 AM	Gifts are placed in the vault.	Thoman and Gorat are both given keys to the vault.
11:30 AM	Drinks and lunch in the tavern.	Rala steals Gorat's key, then sneaks off to steal the *belt of dwarvenkind* from the vault.
1:30 PM	Change and relax in guest quarters.	Free time.
4:00 PM	Ceremony and vows in the temple.	Thoman borrows Gorat's key and heads to the vault to check that everything is there. Jormun performs the ceremony.
4:30 PM	Celebration in the dining hall.	Gorat gives his toast. Thoman returns from checking on the vault, informing Amara of its status just as the toast ends. Gwendolyn asks Thoman to go to the vault and bring the suit of armor to the celebration.
6:00 PM	The caravan departs from Horn Enclave.	Guests prepare to depart. Ironbeard takes Gorat's key and deposits any last gifts in the vault. Flabbergast's ritual ends after the caravan departs.

Map 5.1: Horn Enclave

ing attention to the wedding's schedule makes it easier to find times when they can more easily reach the vaults.

11:00 AM—Arrival

The Dhargun Ironworks caravan rolls up the mountain and approaches the gates to Horn Enclave. Excitement runs high among the dwarf wedding guests, both for the coming events and for their first trip to the storied enclave. Read or paraphrase the following:

> On a gray morning with cloudy skies, three horse-drawn carriages roll up the mountain, heavy with cargo. Dwarves can be seen steering the carriages and peering out of windows, and their voices carry a sense of excitement and wonder as they approach Horn Enclave.
>
> The stronghold is indeed awe-inspiring. A massive arched stone entrance—a marvelous work of art in and of itself—leads into the mountain. Four sets of heavy iron portcullises stand fast before the caravan's approach, with a set of stone doors taller than a giant set behind them to mark the interior entrance to the enclave. The caravan stops and waits as a dwarf with bagpipes steps forward before the portcullis gates.

Flabbergast's Ritual. Flabbergast casts the *ritual of astral transmogrification* as the caravan comes to a stop. As the magic takes effect, each character's consciousness departs its normal body and enters that of a named caravan NPC. Go down the list of caravan NPCs in the order presented in the "Wedding Guests" section above, assigning each guest to a random player until each character has an NPC. (If your group has more than seven players, you'll need to come up with additional NPCs and secrets.) Describe the NPCs and their relationships to all the players, but do not divulge any NPC's secret until it is triggered as described in each itinerary section.

While the ritual is in play, characters have full control of their host bodies and enjoy all capabilities of their new forms, including weapon and skill proficiencies, vision, languages, and spellcasting. They can also apply proficiency bonuses or expertise for skills their characters have, albeit using the ability scores of their new form. However, any spellcasting characters discover that they have left their original magic in their original brains.

Let each player refer to the entry in the *Monster Manual* for their NPC's stat block, so that they can familiarize themselves with their new capabilities. The ritual's magic lasts until nightfall, which is after the caravan's departure. It can be ended before that time for any character with a *dispel magic* spell (DC 20).

Bagpipe-Activated Doors. Once the dwarf with bagpipes has identified the caravan properly, they play the song of the day. (This can be whatever tune you think has appropriate comedic value.) As the bagpipes fill the cavernous entranceway with sound, the portcullises rise. The enormous stone doors are pulled open by two **iron golems**, allowing entrance to the Hall of War.

The carriages remain outside the Hall of War, and dwarves of Clan Horn approach to help with the cargo and lead the guests to the vault. If the characters have a different plan, they can execute it now. The party can contact Flabbergast to have him perform the ritual at any time.

Secrets. No secrets specifically activate at this time. However, several NPCs have secrets triggered by events rather than a specific time. For example, you would provide Tannus's player with the groom's secret if at any time Tannus is about to swing a weapon to damage a creature. (You can decide whether to allow Tannus to fight to protect himself or others, but should encourage the player running him to think about creative nonattack ways to influence the fight.) Provide Amara her secret if she sees her daughter Gwendolyn in danger. Provide Jormun his secret if he sees Gwendolyn or Tannus in danger.

11:15 AM—Hall of War and the Vaults

The caravan is met in the Hall of War by Rizwin Horn, daughter of Lady Kira and Lord Zardak. Rizwin is a capable diplomat and negotiator, and she expects the wedding guests and caravan servants to stick to the areas indicated by the itinerary. She despises Acquisitions Incorporated, and brings the full force of the enclave down upon the characters if she learns they are members of a franchise.

JARED BLANDO

Beyond the double doors is an enormous rectangular hall, easily fifty feet wide and over a hundred feet long, with smaller double doors set into the other three walls. Every surface of the walls, floor, and ceiling is exquisitely carved with runes and bas reliefs depicting dwarves at war. Grand pillars shaped like stone dwarves hold up the ceiling.

The floor is intricately carved and appears to be inset with stone tiles that can shift, lift, and rotate. Five dwarves are in the process of moving tiles around, as if shaping a massive mosaic. Not far from the dwarves is a large metallic construct with a terrifying number of appendages ending in blades and saws. It is thankfully unmoving.

A female dwarf with sharp eyes and deep red hair tied in braids calls out a greeting as she approaches the caravan. "Welcome, guests and friends of Clan Dhargun and Clan Thunderwind! Horn Enclave is at your disposal for the wonderful occasion of your wedding!"

Rizwin (LG female dwarf **knight**) personally greets and congratulates Gwendolyn and Tannus, inquiring about their trip and wishing them a wonderful day. She reviews the itinerary with all members of the group (see the Wedding Itinerary table) and makes sure everyone understands that they are not free to wander the enclave at will.

If asked about the construct, Rizwin calls it the slaughterstone eviscerator, and explains that it's there to protect Horn Enclave. "Moradin help anyone who crosses us," she says, laughing. The construct can be activated by Ironbeard or Rizwin, or by anyone who accesses the control panel in its belly and succeeds on a DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. If the check fails by 5 or more, the construct animates and attacks.

The slaughterstone eviscerator is a deadly wild card, which might serve as a frightening distraction or be woven into the characters' outrageous plans. It uses the stat block of a **stone golem**, but its slam attack is a blade attack that deals slashing damage.

When all other business is done, Rizwin addresses the wedding party one last time.

"Your vault awaits, ready for the gifts each family has brought for the wedding. As instructed, we will safeguard these gifts until Gwendolyn and Tannus are ready to receive them. For today only, keys will be given to Thoman Dhargun and Gorat Thunderwind, for the storage of any additional gifts during the celebration. After that time, Thoman Dhargun will retain one key and Horn Enclave shall retain the other."

Rizwin then grows suddenly stern. "Please remember that Horn Enclave is a secure location. As we are responsible for our other clients, you are expected to remain at all times with your group in the areas indicated for your itinerary. Now, let us proceed together to the vaults."

Rizwin leads the wedding party through the double doors to the north, through the corridor leading past the barracks where dwarf guards can be seen lounging and training, and to the vaults. The double vault indicated with an "X" on the map is the vault for the wedding gifts, the largest and most valuable of which are deposited at this time. (Characters with a solid background in company history might recall that this is the same vault that the core members of Acquisitions Incorporated once robbed.)

Vault Doors and Keys. Each vault door is covered in iron bands, lined with lead to prevent scrying, is air- and watertight, and features layers of locks that make opening a vault without its keys nearly impossible. Two keys are required to open a vault door, with one typically held by the enclave and a second by the owner of the vault's contents. When both keys have been turned in multiple locks, the door opens. While the wedding is in progress, Gorat and Thoman each have one of the keys for the wedding vault.

The vault holding the orrery component has one of its keys held by Ironbeard. The other key is with Lottie at the end of this episode. See "Orrery Vault" below for more information.

NICHOLAS KAY

Picking the Locks. Three consecutive successful DC 20 Dexterity checks using thieves' tools are required to open an outer vault door. Failing any check requires restarting the process. After three overall failures, the door to the vault gives off a loud ringing noise and four guards come to investigate. The DC is reduced to 10 if the character has one of the vault's keys. Any character who has read the vault records (found in Ironbeard's quarters or Lady Kira and Lord Zardak's quarters) has advantage on checks to open a vault door.

Vault Walls. Despite how strong the doors and magic of the vaults are, the walls between adjacent vaults are relatively thin. Dealing 40 bludgeoning or force damage to an inner wall creates a hole wide enough for a character to enter another vault. (What kind of attention doing so attracts is left to your determination.) Other means of entering might be possible, including some of the scrolls carried by Two Dry Cloaks the tabaxi (see "11:30 AM").

Double Vaults. Some vaults are set up as two rooms, with the magically locked door of the second room also requiring a password to be spoken before the door can be opened. The wedding vault is a double vault, with the password set as seen at "Ironbeard's Entrance" below.

Orrery Vault. The single vault holding the orrery component is immediately northeast of the vault marked "X." This vault is further detailed in the "Orrery Vault" section below. Discovering which vault holds the component is an important bit of business that the characters must accomplish at some point during the day. Rizwin knows the location, as does Ironbeard, Lady Kira, and Lord Zardak. The contents of all vaults are also noted in the vault records, a copy of which is kept in Ironbeard's quarters, with another copy in Lady Kira and Lord Zardak's quarters. A character who has studied the records has advantage on checks to open any vault door.

Ironbeard's Entrance. As the gifts from the families are being placed in the wedding vault, a dwarf wizard with a steel-gray beard appears. Ironbeard (LN male dwarf **mage**) introduces himself and wishes the happy couple well. He then inspects the vault, carefully examining everything with the help of a *glass jeweler's eye* (a magic device that functions as a *gem of seeing*).

When he's convinced that all is well, Ironbeard asks the couple to set the password they wish to use for the inner door. For the duration of the wedding, the inner door will remain open so that Gorat and Thoman can access the vaults. But Ironbeard explains that afterward, even someone with both keys cannot open the inner vault unless Gwendolyn or Tannus speaks the password.

If the characters are running Gwendolyn and Tannus, they can set the password as they wish. If the characters are not possessing the wedding guests but are present in the vault, things can get potentially interesting.

Plan B. If the players are not running the wedding party at this point—and if they're up for even more of a roleplaying and improvisational challenge—Gwendolyn and Tannus look to one another and whisper, "Whippoorwill." They laughingly explain that a whippoorwill flew overhead when they first met. Ask any characters within earshot (as they will be if they're acting as tag-along wedding guests) to make Wisdom (Perception) checks, with the highest check overhearing the password. That character gets a moment's warning of what's coming.

In an amazing coincidence, "Whippoorwill" is the phrase Flabbergast set on the stone token to trigger casting the ritual. If the players have come up with a savvy approach to entering the enclave that didn't make use of the ritual, you don't need to use this option. But if your group will have fun with it, Flabbergast hears the word spoken and casts the ritual, so that the characters' bodies slip into a state of slumber as they possess the bodies of the wedding party. What approach the possessed dwarves—now run by the players—might take to explain the characters' sudden unconsciousness, then safely hide those slumbering bodies away, is up to the players and you.

Secrets. No secrets specifically activate at this time. However, Thoman and Gorat now each have a key to the vault that allows them to act on their secrets later.

11:30 AM—The Tavern

Rizwin leads the caravan party back through the barracks, then north, west, and north again to the tavern.

> Great tree trunks have been cut in half to form a series of long tables in this drinking hall. The northern wall behind the bar is formed entirely of kegs of ale, all of them tapped. Busy servers pour frothy mugs and serve them to the multitude of dwarves already here. As Rizwin steps into the tavern, she claps her hands once and several dwarves quickly clear two central tables for the wedding party and guests. Tall mugs of amber beer are served, while platters loaded with skewers of roasted meat and root vegetables are brought to the table. Drinks and food are on the house!

For the next two hours, the caravan party enjoys ale and food, toasts Gwendolyn and Tannus, and swaps tall tales. Guests can visit other tables to meet Clan Horn dwarves, so the characters can move around without drawing attention to themselves. Ironbeard and Rizwin are both here, and the characters can speak to them to try to pick up clues as to the location of the orrery component. (Attempts by any characters to hit on Rizwin are made with disadvantage.)

Many of the Clan Horn dwarves have been drinking heavily. Targeting the heavier drinkers can grant advantage on checks made to pry information from them. While in the tavern, the dwarves are relaxed and won't react negatively to a failed Charisma check. However, continued failures result in guards being called. Those guards issue a warning against bothering folk not in the wedding party, and might eventually search or incarcerate any individual who continues to cause trouble.

Tabaxi Merchant. Sticking out like a sore thumb is a lone merchant at the end of one of the long tables. Two Dry Cloaks (N female tabaxi) wears a bandolier of magic wands and watches over a number of small chests beneath her table. She passes herself off as an

accomplished mage and merchant, though she's actually a career rogue—and a member of an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. After looting the treasury of a religious order she was formerly affiliated with, Two Dry Cloaks has come to Horn Enclave to deposit her ill-gained goods and lay low for a while. Whether her franchise is known to the characters (and whether her recent theft was done for the franchise or as a solo job) is left up to you. Naturally, Two Dry Cloaks has made sure that the dwarves of Clan Horn know nothing of her company affiliations.

To use Two Dry Cloaks as an NPC, give her the stat block of a **spy** with these changes:

- She has the following attack option: ***Claws.*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) slashing damage.
- She has the following racial trait: ***Feline Agility.*** When the tabaxi moves on its turn in combat, it can double its speed until the end of the turn. Once it uses this ability, the tabaxi can't use it again until it moves 0 feet on one of its turns.
- She has the iconic hoardsperson feature (see "Iconic Faction Features" in appendix B).

(More information on the tabaxi can be found in *Volo's Guide to Monsters*.)

Two Dry Cloaks is a wild card, placed in the adventure to help the characters gain information. She can share details about the vaults in general, where vault records are stored, and the like. Intimidation and trickery work on her well enough, but a friendly attitude wins her over to the characters more strongly. If the characters stay on her good side, she might become a valuable ally and resource.

Two Dry Cloaks

Two Dry Cloaks's wands pulse with magical light, though only two of them have actual useful properties. The first is a *wand of binding* that glows purple. The second wand blinks with blue and green light and is a failed experiment at combining a *wand of fireballs* and a *wand of lightning*. It functions as a *wand of fireballs*, except it has only two charges per day and casts either a green-flamed *fireball* or a blue *lightning bolt* at random. Two Dry Cloaks also carries a scroll tube with three *spell scrolls*: *prayer of healing*, *silence*, and *stone shape*.

Lady and Lord Horn. Lady Kira Horn and Lord Zardak Horn (NG female and male dwarf **veterans**) arrive halfway through lunch. Zardak is half-blind and periodically confers with his wife to make sure he is speaking to the correct person. Both are pleased to have a wedding in their halls, and they engage in small talk to ask polite questions of their guests. Many of those questions involve the business operations of Dhargun Ironworks and the military history of Clan Thunderwind. Thankfully, neither Kira nor Zardak appear to mind if a character isn't too sure about the answer.

At a time of your choosing, Lord Zardak appears to notice something odd about one of the characters or the body they inhabit, but this ends up just being his bad eyesight. Fifteen minutes after they arrive, the two take their leave.

Rala's Secret. Rala's secret triggers during this scene, and the character inside Rala's body is momentarily overwhelmed by the doppelganger's personality. Stealing Gorat's key requires a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check contested by Gorat's Wisdom (Perception) check. Gorat has disadvantage on the check from the distraction of the festivities—or, if controlled by a character, he could decide to just hand over the key. Rala must then decide whether to also try to steal Thoman's key (if he isn't possessed by a character inspired to give it to her). Having two keys makes opening the door effortless, but the security chief is a cagey and suspicious sort.

Once she has at least one key, a DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check allows Rala to exit the tavern without being drawn back into the general merriment by one of the guests. She must then succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check to make it past the barracks without notice and reach the vaults. Rala could instead do away with stealth and attempt to talk her way past the guards, given that she's a known member of the wedding party and has the vault key in her possession. Combat is a poor option, however. Each barracks room holds ten dwarves (use the **guard** stat block, with the modifications noted for dwarf members of the wedding party).

1:30 PM—Guest Quarters

Rizwin directs the guests out of the tavern and to the guest quarters. Here they can relax, take a nap (and sober up as necessary) before changing into the formal wedding attire waiting for them in their rooms.

This time off is a perfect opportunity to figure out where the orrery component is stored and make a move

on the vault. Rala's disappearance might complicate things, but she can reappear just as everyone is entering their chambers. Depending on how the player handles the scene, Rala might not admit to having already been in the wedding vault (and likely has the *belt of dwarvenkind* hidden upon her person). It takes a number of successful ability checks (possibly group checks) to leave the guest quarters, cross the barracks, and reach the vault. Use the same DCs and options provided for Rala in the previous itinerary section as guidelines.

Once the characters reach the vaults, they must decide how to proceed. See the "11:15 AM" section for information on breaching the vaults and the "Orrery Vault" section below for information on what is found within that vault.

Secrets. No secrets specifically activate at this time.

4:00 PM—Temple

Dressed in their finest, the members of the Dhargun and Thunderwind families head to the temple. Rizwin leads them south through the Hall of War and east past dwarven residences. Ironbeard exits his quarters to join them, revealing the location of that area if the characters haven't sussed it out already. The temple is beautifully carved to depict the Mordinsamman (the dwarven pantheon), including fine statues of Moradin, Clangeddin Silverbeard, Berronar Truesilver, and Haela Brightaxe.

After initial pleasantries, Rizwin indicates to Jormun that he may climb the steps to the dais to begin the ceremony. At this time, Thoman's secret triggers.

Thoman's Secret. As the ceremony begins, Thoman gets an odd feeling as he recalls hearing Amara worrying about the vault and what might happen to the still-fractious relationship between the families if anything were stolen from it. To appease Amara, he wants to check the vault and report to her if all is not well. This requires borrowing Gorat's key, which Gorat lends willingly (whether run by a player or not). The mercurial Thunderwind has no concerns that a Dhargun lackey would dare do anything to jeopardize the wedding. However, if Gorat's key is still missing after being stolen by Rala, the doppelganger will need to quickly arrange to have it found to avoid a sudden catastrophe.

Thoman won't return in time to see the vows, so he plans to meet everyone at the celebration in the dining hall. He feels compelled only to report missing items (such as the *belt of dwarvenkind* or anything taken by the characters). If under a player's control, he need not mention anything else amiss (such as a hole in the wall) as long as the vault's contents are intact.

The Ceremony. Jormun would normally provide a fiery ceremony on the virtues of the Mordinsamman, with an emphasis on Clangeddin's battle prowess. If a character is controlling him, that character can be put on the spot to describe the ceremony and how the dwarves reconcile the different elements of the pantheon (in particular, the balance between gods of war such as Clangeddin and those of marriage and home, such as Berronar Truesilver). Clan Dhargun is pleased by an emphasis on the hearth, while Clan Thunderwind appreciates an emphasis on battle.

Secret? What Secret?

Though most players should embrace the mayhem and roleplaying opportunity created by their NPCs' goals, some might have trouble reconciling these goals with their desire to accomplish their franchise mission. Downplaying a secret goal can feel like the best path to securing the orrery component and winning, while some players might blurt out their secret goal with the excuse that their character would try to do so.

Encourage players to embrace the roles and enjoy the concept of momentarily placing their NPC's secret goal as a top priority. Players might be more willing to take this on if you let them know that the scenario takes their conflicting priorities into account. Indeed, these scenes place an emphasis on situational comedy over numerical challenge. So players should think of the role as their challenge—can they succeed at playing someone they're not?

The hall then grows quiet. Look to the characters inhabiting the wedding couple, letting them know everyone is staring at them. If they don't guess what's happening, one of the guests leans forward and reminds the couple to join Jormun on the altar. The guests have a good laugh at the couple forgetting the ceremony details, chalking it all up to the pair being nervous.

Once at the altar, Jormun asks for the couple's vows. This is a fun opportunity to see if the two players want to improvise vows, since they were supposed to have memorized them. After the vows, Jormun pronounces them a married couple and the hall erupts in cheers.

After allowing everyone to receive the couple, Rizwin thanks Jormun for the wonderful ceremony (even if it left much to be desired) and leads everyone back the way they came and north to the dining hall. Characters could try to make their way to the vault at this time, though anyone doing so runs into Thoman, and are likely to be noticed arriving late to the celebration.

4:30 PM—Dining Hall

The dining hall has been festooned with colored streamers and lit with huge braziers. Long tables in the center include platters of food and seats for guests, while a table nearby holds gifts from attendees (including a few from Clan Horn). Servers bring ale and spirits, and the mood is festive. Ironbeard, Rizwin, and even Two Dry Cloaks are all here, though Lady Kira and Lord Zardak are not.

Gorat's Secret. Gorat's secret is the first to activate in this section. His goal is to come up with a toast that calls Tannus to battle, to see once and for all whether his friend has changed. Encourage the player whose character possesses Gorat to make up a toast that urges Tannus to tell a story of his prowess at war. Secretly, Gorat hopes that Tannus turns down the challenge. How Tannus responds could determine whether his clan has an easier or harder time calming down once chaos erupts. A good battle tale leaves them eager to fight!

As the challenge is being resolved, Thoman returns from checking the vault and heads to Amara to report his findings.

Gwendolyn's Secret. When Thoman arrives, Gwendolyn asks him to borrow Gorat's key (if he doesn't

No Trouble Here

If the players were lucky, clever, showed amazing restraint, or somehow failed to have their characters access the vaults at all, it's possible that Thoman didn't find anything missing. If he reports to Amara that all is well, the celebration is uneventful and the ending could feel a bit flat. If you want to shake things up a bit, you could activate the tabaxi merchant. In this option, Two Dry Cloaks is a thief who hits the vault before the first or second time Thoman checks it. This act achieves the desired chaos, and should give the characters opportunities to notice Two Dry Cloaks. Perhaps she looks guilty, has some cuts and bruises, or has a bulge under her shirt from concealed treasure. Once the tabaxi is identified as the culprit—and especially if the characters out her as an Acquisitions Incorporated franchisee—the chaos dies down.

still have it), then go to the vault and bring the suit of armor to the celebration. Depending on what Thoman has found, it's possible that he's in the middle of telling Amara about missing items.

Amara's Secret. If an item has been stolen, Amara's secret triggers and she races to get her battleaxe from the gift table. She then begins searching for the culprit and screaming about thieves and saboteurs. The items in the vault are meant to bind the fractious families, and if any are missing (presumably taken back by one family or the other), the wedding might be considered invalid.

Missing Items. News of any trouble at the vault spreads like wildfire, and members of both families begin accusing each other. Chaos erupts! Thankfully, the guards of Horn Enclave know that any dwarven wedding comes with a certain amount of chaos, and are keen to let the two families sort their problems out before getting involved. As such, this scene is a great opportunity for the characters to explore their NPCs' personalities and backstories as things get heated. By focusing on the humor of potential conflicts, you can avoid having the guards rush in as a first response.

The characters have many options here. They could use the opportunity to escape (or head to the orrery vault if they haven't already). More than likely, they'll be inside NPC bodies and need to defuse the situation so they can reach the caravan departure phase in one piece.

The characters could try to save the marriage, perhaps resolving the crime by pinning it on one person (or convincing Rala to take the fall). Let the players develop a plan and add reactions from the crowd (including Clan Horn NPCs) as needed. Accusations and turmoil prompt Ironbeard and several guards to inspect the wedding vault, which could lead to the discovery of any breach into the orrery vault.

Innocent Bystanders

If the characters have already accessed the orrery vault, they could decide they don't care what happens and sit on the sidelines to watch. In this case, take the events directly to them so that they're encouraged to react. An effective technique is to couple an NPC approaching them with a surge of emotions within one of the controlled NPCs. For example, Ironbeard could call for everyone to be searched, just as Amara (and the character controlling her) begins to contemplate what might befall her daughter if the families decide the wedding is invalid.

Tannus's and Jormun's Secrets. If violence breaks out between the families (or between Horn Enclave and any possible thieves), Tannus finds that he really wants to avoid being violent. This might be his last chance to prove his love to Gwendolyn! Jormun's secret causes him to protect the married couple at all costs. His actions could help bring the warring families together by example.

6:00 PM—Departure

Once the chaos dies down, the guests can go back to merrymaking until the evening comes. If the chaos doesn't die down, the dwarves of Clan Horn eventually order the warring Dhargun and Thunderwind families to leave the enclave and sort out their problems on their own.

Guests are led—or driven at spear point—through the Hall of War and out the main doors to their waiting carriages. (Characters who triggered the ritual within the enclave will need to juggle getting both their dwarven hosts and their original bodies out.) Rizwin, Ironbeard, Lady Kira, and Lord Zardak all come to say appropriate goodbyes. Ironbeard takes Gorat's key, then returns to the dining hall with several guards to take any last gifts from the celebration to the vault. By the time he does so, the caravan has safely departed.

The characters can say any final words. If they stole any treasure, they can attempt to drop it over the side of the caravan for later retrieval. As the sun dips below the horizon, Flabbergast's ritual ends and the characters return to their normal bodies. Continue with the section "Battle in the Skies" as they travel toward Lottie's domain.

Orrery Vault

At some point during the wedding itinerary, the characters attempt to breach the vault containing the *wheel of stars*. See the "11 AM" section for information on the wedding vault, the vault doors, and other defenses. When the characters enter the orrery vault, read:

> Statues of human-sized brass dragons stand at the center of the vault, their heads pointed at a globe of light hovering in the air between them. A circular clockwork device floats within the light, recognizable even at a distance as one of the components of the *Orrery of the Wanderer*."

Clockwork Dragons

Each of the dragon statues in this area is a **clockwork dragon** (see appendix B), and is indistinguishable from a metal statue until it moves. If the characters are possessing the bodies of the dwarf wedding guests, two

clockwork dragons are on guard here. If the characters are themselves, they face five of the creatures.

The clockwork dragons take no action until a character moves toward the globe of light, at which point, they swivel their heads toward the nearest characters and speak (see below). If any character steps within 5 feet of the globe of light, the clockwork dragons attack all creatures in the room, though they continue to respond to characters engaging them in conversation even during the fight. (If a character attempts to seize the component, see "The Missing Component," below.)

Properly engaging the constructs gives the characters a chance to learn about the orrery's creator and where she can be found. As part of the conversation, the clockwork creatures start off by asking the characters the following questions:

- "Who are you, and what are your ideals?" (Ideals related to running a business or earning a fortune appear to please the clockwork creatures.)
- "Who do you serve?" (The clockwork creatures show no reaction to any response.)
- "Why have you come to Lottie's vault?" (This can lead the characters to ask about Lottie, who the clockwork creatures know as the wizard who created the orrery.)
- If any character mentions the orrery, the clockwork creatures ask, "Why do you seek the orrery?" (Responses that suggest the franchise is trying to stop some great evil can result in the clockwork creatures sharing Lottie's location.)
- "What would disappoint you the most right now?" (If a character mentions the need to recover the final orrery component, a clockwork creature answers, "Prepare to be disappointed.")
- "What is the best way to make money?" (The clockwork creatures are particularly pleased if a risky endeavor, including running a franchise, is mentioned.)

If fully and properly engaged, the clockwork creatures share the following information:

- The creatures state that they will harm only those who have come to the vault with the intent of misusing the orrery (which they assume includes anyone trying to steal the component). However, they are not automatically friendly to those claiming other intent.
- The creatures were created to guard this vault and its contents.
- Lottie, a powerful wizard and clockmaker, created them. (The clockwork dragons do not identify Lottie as a lich.)
- Lottie also created the orrery, but later scattered it and its components. The creatures do not know why Lottie did this.
- "It is best not to cross Lottie. She destroys all who dare rise against her."
- If the creatures believe the characters' cause is just (or at least coincidentally would prevent a great evil), they can share that Lottie lives in a cave near a destroyed town called Fortune, located amid hills to the east of the Greypeak Mountains, not far from the desert of Anauroch.
- The town of Fortune was built recently and quickly destroyed by Lottie for daring to challenge her authority.
- "Lottie would not like our telling you too much about her. She's very powerful, is a master of clockwork, and has lots of style."

If the characters earn the clockwork dragons' complete trust, they are allowed to reach for the orrery component where it floats within the light. But the dragons warn them that they might not get what they want.

The Missing Component

The final orrery component, the *wheel of stars*, appears to float within the globe of light. However, the characters are ultimately unsuccessful in their attempt to claim the component, because the orrery's creator is using the vaults of Horn Enclave as a clever ruse.

A lich named Lottie created the orrery—and then scattered its pieces far and wide when she realized how dangerously powerful it was. Wanting to dissuade adventurers and others from trying to collect the pieces, she made it known that one piece was sealed in the vaults of Horn Enclave. In truth, that piece has been with Lottie the whole time, even as the false story kept those seeking the *wheel of stars* away from her.

The orrery component cannot be moved or manipulated by magic. When any creature attempts to physically seize the component, it reveals itself as an illusion. As the illusion dissolves, it is replaced by a small (real) leather bag floating within the globe of light, on which

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is written "Congratulations!" Within the bag are thirty strange coins that appear to be gold, but which are actually copper covered in gold foil and stamped with the letter L. (These are tokens for Lottie's casino; see "Lottie's Palace" later in this section.) Also in the bag is a note bearing a message in a regal script.

> *Congratulations on the determination that got you this far in search of the wheel of stars! And sorry that your reward has been denied you. The wheel has been with me always, and even as this ruse is ended, I promise it shall never be given over to those who would use the power of the orrery for woe. If that be you, feel free to face me—and know your doom. But if perchance you have come here seeking the orrery so as to destroy it ... well, then, you have piqued my interest.*
>
> *My name is Lottie. Find me if you can.*

Loose Ends

If the characters kill the clockwork dragons without talking to them, the constructs are able to speak even after being smashed. This can allow the characters to question them, and vice versa. If the characters completely miss all the clues in this section, additional downtime or asking Head Office for help can provide details regarding someone named Lottie with a penchant for creating clockwork creatures.

Though the characters are unable to claim the final orrery component at this time, they now know where it and its creator can be found. Once the caravan departs and they return to their bodies, they can plan their next move.

Going in Style

The journey south and east to the Greypeak Mountains covers miles of treacherous terrain, and time is of the essence. As such, the trip presents an opportunity for the characters to play with one of Acquisitions Incorporated's most sought-after assets—a battle balloon.

The characters can report back the outcome of their Horn Enclave mission to Flabbergast or Omin Dran, or Head Office makes contact with them if they report back to Gilda Duhn first. Knowing the importance of tracking Lottie down, Omin authorizes the loan of the battle balloon at once, with the vehicle arriving at the characters' location within a few days—accompanied by a voluminous contract and an extensive list of penalties to be paid if anything should happen to it.

The primary focus of the agreement is to clarify the incomprehensibly high rental cost (waived by Omin for this mission), and to emphasize that the vehicle remains the property of Acquisitions Incorporated. The lengthy process of signing, countersigning, witnessing, and signing again is followed by the characters providing samples of fingernail and hair clippings. In case of the destruction of the balloon and all aboard, the company reserves the right to resurrect characters as indentured servants to work off the loss.

The crew that delivered the battle balloon remain with the ship, though the characters are firmly in charge and have plenty to do on board, as seen in the next section. Appendix C provides combat statistics for the battle balloon (because you know that's coming), so assume that a suitable number of crew are available to operate the balloon and its weapons alongside the characters.

Riders on the Storm

As the characters travel to the Greypeaks, they encounter unusual weather, followed by an ambush by the Six. How well the characters negotiate the weather determines certain elements of the ambush.

Nasty Weather

> The sun hides behind clouds that increasingly darken as you head toward the Greypeak Mountains—and, hopefully, the wizard who created the orrery. A steady rain begins to fall, and the wind begins to howl. A crash of thunder is followed by forks of lightning. Soon, sheets of rain are falling while lightning flashes on every side. The lightning forms concentrated pockets, creating a maze of sorts.

A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check confirms that the storm is not natural. It might have been manipulated by a powerful spell, an artifact, or proximity to a portal to an elemental plane. But whatever its origin, it is obvious to the characters that they must maneuver the battle balloon through the storm, and retreat is not an option.

Have the characters select a role on the battle balloon from one of the following:

Captain, providing leadership to the other characters and crew
Pilot, charting a safe course
Weapon master, directing the crew operating the vehicle's weapons in case enemies appear
Lookout, watching for dangers
Mechanic, leading the crew battening down the hatches and making repairs

Additional characters in a really large party can use the Help action to aid one of the characters taking a role above, or can come up with their own strategy (such as casting an appropriate spell). Any roles not filled by characters can be filled by crew members, who have a +3 bonus to any ability checks made in this section.

Riding out the storm takes place as three distinct events that play out over a few minutes.

Event 1

The storm has become deadly, with pockets of lightning flaring all around the battle balloon. Have the characters make the following ability checks, with the outcome determine as noted . Spells and clever ideas can be substituted for any of the suggested actions if you deem them effective.

Weapon Master. No enemies appear during this event. However, the weapon master can use the Help action to assist the lookout or the captain.

Lookout. Have the lookout attempt a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to call out the many pockets of lightning ahead.

Captain. The members of the crew are on edge. Have the captain make a DC 14 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check to steady the crew and prepare them for the pilot's commands.

Pilot. Have the pilot attempt a DC 13 Dexterity check to chart a course through the lightning. Proficiency with flying vehicles can be used for this check. The check is made with disadvantage if the lookout failed their check, but is made with advantage if the crew has been steadied by the captain. If the check succeeds, the battle balloon avoids any lightning. If the check fails, each character takes 9 (2d8) lightning damage. The battle balloon takes the same amount of damage to its hull and catches fire (see below). In addition, the crew is shaken, imposing disadvantage on any checks by the captain in the next event.

Mechanic. If the ship is on fire, the mechanic must make a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to reach the fires and put them out with the crew's aid. On a success, the fire is extinguished. On a failure, the fire deals another 9 (2d8) fire damage to the battle balloon's hull before being extinguished by the driving rains.

If there is no fire, the mechanic can lock down stray lines to give the pilot advantage on their next check.

Event 2

The storm dies down as the battle balloon sails away from the pockets of thunder and lightning. That's when fist-sized hail begins to drop out of the sky. As you search for a path out of this storm, a rock of ice the size of a giant's boulder misses the balloon by a few feet!

Lookout. Have the lookout attempt a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot areas where the storm thins and warn the pilot when boulder-sized hail would strike the battle balloon.

Captain. The captain must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check to steady the crew and prepare them for the pilot's commands. This check is made with disadvantage if the pilot failed their check in the previous event.

Pilot. Have the pilot attempt two DC 14 Dexterity checks to chart a course through the hailstorm. Proficiency with flying vehicles can be used for these checks. A check is made with disadvantage if the lookout failed their check this event, but is made with advantage if the crew has been successfully steadied by the captain this event or if there was no fire in the previous event. If both checks succeed, the pilot manages to avoid the hail and heroically steers the battle balloon to safety. If one check succeeds, each character takes 5 (1d10) cold damage from the hail and the crew is shaken for the next event.

Sticking with What They've Got

If the characters' mobile headquarters is something cool enough that they would rather use it than the borrowed battle balloon to travel to the Greypeaks, that's fine. Just rework the encounters in the "Riders on the Storm" and "Battle in the Skies" sections appropriately. For example, a giant walking robot can be toppled by rough storm winds or damaged by lightning and hail. The area around a teleporting headquarters such as a tavern that lets characters travel to other taverns can become the site of the Six's airship attack, and so forth.

If both checks fail, two NPC crew members are killed, the captain has disadvantage on their check in the next event, and a massive boulder of ice heads for the battle balloon.

Weapon Master. If the pilot failed both checks, the weapon master must attempt to shoot the ice boulder with one of the battle balloon's weapons. If the attack hits, the boulder is destroyed. If the attack misses, the boulder strikes the battle balloon, killing a crew member and dealing 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage and 5 (1d10) cold damage to the battle balloon's hull. If the pilot succeeded at one check, the weapon master is free to help the mechanic.

Mechanic. Regardless of any other damage taken so far, the battle balloon's rigging has been torn by the hail. The mechanic can attempt a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check or a Wisdom check making use of proficiency with flying vehicles to repair the damage. On a success, the battle balloon operates normally. On a failure, the pilot has disadvantage on their next check.

Event 3

Though the winds still howl and buffet the battle balloon, the lightning and hail falls away behind you. The clouds turn from purple-black to a light gray. That's when you see the funnel cloud moving toward you. And ... is that a face forming within it?

The storm has attracted a massive sentient funnel cloud that threatens to consume the battle balloon!

Lookout. Have the lookout attempt a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to track the funnel cloud's movement and call out large debris.

Captain. Have the captain make a DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check to steady the crew and prepare them for the pilot's commands. This check is made with disadvantage if the pilot failed both checks in the previous event.

Weapon Master. The weapon master can attempt to shoot the huge storm in the face with one of the battle balloon's weapons. If the attack hits AC 16, the storm momentarily wavers. This can be used to counteract one failed check earlier in this event, by either steadying the crew or giving the lookout time to shout new instructions to the pilot.

Pilot. Have the pilot attempt a DC 14 Dexterity check to dart away from the funnel cloud, making use of

proficiency with flying vehicles. This check is made with disadvantage if the lookout failed their check this event (or if the mechanic failed their check in the previous event), but is made with advantage if the crew has been steadied during this event. With a success, the battle balloon evades the storm without taking damage. If the check fails, the battle balloon's hull takes 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage.

Mechanic. The battle balloon rigging is being torn apart by the strong winds. The character must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check or a Wisdom check making use of proficiency with flying vehicles to prevent further damage. If the check fails, the battle balloon's hull takes 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage.

The sentient cloud moves along as the storm passes. But there's no time to relax ...

Battle in the Skies!

Immediately after the last "Riders on the Storm" event ends, the characters come under attack by an airship controlled by the Six. If anyone needs healing, you could let the characters each have a round to cast a spell or drink a potion. But otherwise, the action is continuous.

> Dropping out from behind a dark cloud is an airship held aloft by a large balloon—emblazoned with the sigil of the Six! A crew of hobgoblins and goblins can be seen swarming the deck, and a ballista and three harpoon guns are trained on your vessel. To arms!

If the battle balloon took more than 20 damage, the chaos of the storm has distracted the characters and crew. In that event, all creatures on the characters' battle balloon are surprised by the airship sent by the Six to engage the franchise—and to steal the franchise's orrery components. Use the battle balloon stat block from appendix C for the Six's airship, but substitute the following Blowout Ballista attack for the Green Flame Arbalester attack:

Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, range 200/800 ft. (can't hit targets within 60 ft. of it), one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage and 22 (4d10) fire damage.

The airship's crew is made up of a female **hobgoblin captain** named Garla, six **hobgoblins**, six **goblins**, six **smoke mephits**, and a **hippogriff** (serving as the captain's mount). All these creatures are recent mercenary hires, so none of them have the iconic affiliate of the Six features. They employ the following strategy, hoping to distract the characters while they steal the orrery housing and as many of its components as they can.

Round 1

The Six's airship begins 100 feet away from the characters' battle balloon. Roll initiative for the airship and all the creatures on it, but the creatures intentionally take no actions this turn. The Six's airship keeps more than 60 feet away from the characters' battle balloon to allow it to fire all weapons. In this round, the Six operatives don't reel in the lines of their airship's harpoon guns, content to attack at range and entice the characters to make counterattacks against the enemy ship. The hippogriff, the smoke mephits, and half the goblins and hobgoblins are below decks to avoid damage. One of the mephits activates a *wand of magic detection*.

Round 2

If any harpoons have hit, the Six's crew begin to reel them in using the airship's Harpoon Haul, pulling the characters' battle balloon closer. In this and later rounds, if the Six's airship and the characters' battle balloon are within 5 feet of each other, half the goblins and all the hobgoblins except the captain board the characters' vessel, hoping to draw the characters into one-on-one combat.

Round 3

A second airship drops out of the clouds! This ship has no visible crew and no weapons, but it does have an outrageously sized needle attached to its prow. This second airship does not attack or have any active crew. It simply deploys the needle in the hope of puncturing the characters' battle balloon.

If the characters are using their own mobile headquarters, adjust the mechanism as appropriate to that headquarters, making use of some obvious vulnerability. The mechanism's purpose should be immediately obvious. For example, if the headquarters is a walking statue, the mechanism might be an arm that deploys a huge bear trap.

It takes 2 rounds for the needle to reach the characters' battle balloon. When the needle makes contact, it automatically deals sufficient damage to the balloon to create a slow-leaking puncture. This doesn't cause a sudden crash, but the battle balloon begins to descend slowly to the ground. To prevent this from happening, the characters must destroy the needle (AC 10, 75 hit points, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and vulnerability to bludgeoning damage).

Hoping that the characters are suitably distracted, all four mephits slip overboard and fly around and under the characters' battle balloon, hoping to pinpoint the location of any strong magic on board.

Round 4 and Beyond

Any remaining goblins emerge to board the battle balloon and attack the characters. The hobgoblin captain rides her hippogriff into battle. The mephits assume that the strongest magic they detect on the battle balloon is the orrery components the characters have collected, and they undertake any combination of attacks and ability checks you determine to claim those components. One mephit flies away with each component claimed, attempting to blind characters trying to follow it with its Cinder Breath.

The hobgoblins and goblins protect the mephits, even as they obey orders to take out characters holding the orrery components. If all the orrery components held by the characters are claimed, any surviving Six operatives flee the battle.

Splugoth's Retreat. The airship with the needle disengages once the needle has been successfully deployed or destroyed. As it departs the scene, the characters

spot a smirking goblin with one pale eye looking out at them through a porthole. Splugoth the Returned laughs at or curses the characters, as appropriate to the success or failure of his agents in retrieving the characters' orrery components. In a worst-case scenario in which the characters come after him, Splugoth points his airship at the ground, where it crashes in 2 rounds. During that time, he drinks a *potion of invisibility* and jumps overboard wearing a *ring of feather falling*. The characters get another chance at Splugoth in episode 6.

Mopping Up

If the characters capture the Six's airship, they find it is in a sorry state. It will not fly much longer, and is beyond repair. By the same token, the characters need to repair their borrowed battle balloon. A few hours' work (including salvaging parts from the Six's airship if applicable) makes the Acq Inc battle balloon airworthy again for the continued journey.

Any Six operatives captured during the fight are keen to earn their freedom by telling everything they know. They were hired by Splugoth the Returned—a goblin who hates Acquisitions Incorporated, and who claims to have returned from the dead. Splugoth hired the hobgoblins and goblins to attack the characters as a distraction, but they know nothing else about the Six's plans.

(Mis)Fortune

Once the battle is over, the characters continue the voyage to the Greypeak Mountains, following up on the information gained in the Horn Enclave vault. The mysterious wizard, Lottie, is said to have destroyed the town of Fortune, and the characters are about to find out just what kind of destruction took place.

Fortune's End

> On the eighth day of travel, you finally locate the town of Fortune, hidden in the foothills of the Greypeak Mountains near the desert of Anauroch. Though dusk is upon you, even in the fading light, you can see that the town was never very big to begin with—and that it is completely destroyed. Most of its buildings are empty shells and piles of wreckage. Looming beyond the town is a large, dark cavern. A narrow river winds down from the mountain and along one side of the town. Its water is a strange phosphorescent green color.

The characters can wander around the town as desired, but the only thing that greets them is the wind blowing through empty streets.

Investigating the Town. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals infrequent tracks belonging to different humanoid creatures. Some travel alone, while others go in small groups. A check of 17 or higher also reveals dog prints, though some of those prints have more claws per foot than an ordinary dog.

A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check made to search the ruins determines that many of the houses are not actually destroyed—they were simply in the process of being built and never finished. The construction was hurried and cheap, which caused the structures' rapid deterioration. None of the houses hold valuables, but a few reveal makeshift shelters within, along with piles of old clothing and bedding. One of the shelters is built from large wooden signs upon which is written: "There's a Fortune to Be Made in Fortune!", "Choose Fortune and Win!", and "Tokens! Lowest Prices!"

The grass, trees, and other plants in the area appear normal. Birds and rodents can be seen in typical numbers. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check turns up no signs of physical damage consistent with a battle that could have leveled the town.

Questionable River. The water of the river is thick and slow moving, glows a phosphorescent green, and smells awful. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check indicates that the water has been contaminated by magic and has unusual side effects. Anyone drinking the water gains the poisoned condition for 1 hour and has a 50 percent chance to spontaneously grow an extra head. The extra head can speak, see, and hear, but provides no mechanical benefits. It shrinks away to nothing after 1 hour.

Gambling Fever

After the characters have had time to look around, or if they make for the cavern straight away, read:

> A murmur of voices slowly builds within the wrecked buildings. A stocky humanoid with gray skin and a white beard suddenly stumbles forth, swaying from one side to the other as if intoxicated. It stares at you, points a finger, and yells, "Tokens!" Three more humanoids emerge from the buildings, yelling, "Tokens!" Two of them control dogs on leashes—though each of those dogs has two heads.

Creatures. These four **duergar** start as Medium creatures. In the first 2 rounds of combat, each uses the Enlarge action after pulling out a bottle filled with phosphorescent green liquid and drinking it. (The liquid appears to trigger the duergar's sudden growth and battle prowess, but they drink only to firm up their resolve. See "Development" below.) The duergar are too inebriated to turn invisible. Because night is falling, their Sunlight Sensitivity does not hinder them.

The two **death dogs** quickly pull away from their masters and attack. Each drips green liquid from its jaws and fights until defeated.

As they fight, the duergar continually shout out, "Tokens!" in an angry tone. They can be convinced to calm down or surrender if they are shown and promised the tokens the characters received in Horn Enclave, but they otherwise don't respond to any attempts at conversation.

Development. The duergar are quite mad, having been poisoned by the stream and stricken with gambling fever in Lottie's Palace. (See the next section for more information.) Their clothing and armor is filthy, and they carry only their weapons and one extra bottle

of fermented river water. The glowing green liquid has no benefit if imbibed. Rather, any humanoid drinking from a bottle suffers as if they had drunk from the river (see above) and gains a killer hangover that imposes one level of exhaustion when the effect wears off.

Almost Here!

When the characters have fought the duergar and determined that there's nothing of import in Fortune, they can make their way toward the cavern beyond the town.

> The cavern looms more than twenty feet wide and tall, opening up to a dark tunnel that winds its way beneath the foothills. A strange smell hangs on the air, reminiscent of oil and ozone.

A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check to search around the cavern entrance detects a pressure plate running wall to wall under the dirt floor. If the check is 17 or higher, it also notes a rectangular object hanging from the ceiling fifty feet farther down the tunnel. This "trap" can be disabled with a DC 14 Dexterity check using thieves' tools.

Stepping on the pressure plate or failing to disable it causes an audible click and the sound of whirring gears. The rectangular object ahead reveals itself to be a large metal sign that is suddenly outlined in bright pink light, and which bears the words "Welcome! You are Almost Here!" shining brightly. If the sign is not activated, it can be read by any creature within 10 feet of it.

Farther down the twisting tunnel, a second pressure plate activates another sign that spells out "Tokens Available!" in brilliant green. Not far from the sign is a bridge leading over the glowing green river where it bisects the tunnel. Beyond the bridge, a third pressure plate lights up a sign reading "Loosest Slots In Faerûn!"

When the characters round a last corner beyond the third sign, read:

> The darkness of the tunnel suddenly gives way to light. Tiny glowing globes, many of them blinking, flare to life along the walls and ceiling ahead. Hanging from the tunnel roof is an enormous sign, around which more globes of light chase each other, and on which are lit up the words "Lottie's Palace." Wide steps at the end of the tunnel lead up to a set of open double doors.

There are no dangers outside the palace, beyond exposure to too much flashing light.

Lottie's Palace

The creator of the *Orrery of the Wanderer*, Lottie is a lich and a master of clockwork magic. Her palace is not a typical lich's lair, however, instead taking the form of a swanky casino. As a functional gambling den, public places within Lottie's Palace are safe. Dangerous creatures guard only the restricted areas, including the machinery room and access to Lottie's meeting hall and private chamber.

The characters' arrival at Lottie's Palace coincides with a liches' retreat, wherein Lottie gathers with some of her lich friends to do lich stuff. The characters need to poke around to find their way to Lottie, and can learn useful information with which to present their case before her while they do. In the end, their goal is to learn the last of the orrery's secrets, and to claim the final orrery component from her.

Map 5.2 shows the layout of Lottie's Palace.

1. Gambling Den

> As you pass through the doors, you enter a world of opulence. Glass chandeliers fill a huge open chamber with brilliant light. The floors are carpeted, the walls decorated with scrollwork and painted with images of golden coins bearing the letter L. Dark wooden beams span the vast ceiling, which glitters with thousands of tiny gems.
>
> The center of the area holds a sunken gambling pit that is packed with people, sitting in leather-upholstered chairs around tables covered in green velvet. To one side of the hall is a stage where three harpists play, surrounded by a lounge with comfortable chairs and small tables. Beyond that is the bar, and a door presumably leading to a kitchen. A sign to your right indicates the "Powder Room," while another to your left indicates "Tokens." To the far left is a fortified iron door sealed with a large lock. The center of the far wall features another set of double doors.
>
> The clientele here all look a lot like the duergar you saw in the town of Fortune. All are gambling in a frenzy, arguing with one another over tokens and swearing that the next game will be the big one. Most of them are drinking heavily.
>
> As you take it all in, a skeleton wearing a red uniform with a high collar and a crisp-looking hat approaches you.

Skeleton Staff. The staff of Lottie's Palace are all skeletons with the power of magical speech. The skeleton that approaches the characters greets them in Common, suggests they get some tokens at the cashier, and presents everyone with a tray of drinks. These are complimentary beverages, loaded with rum and fruit juice. They taste delicious, but any character who imbibes four or more drinks gains the poisoned condition for 1 hour, or until the character has a meal at the lounge.

A total of twenty **skeletons** work the floor, acting as dealers, bartenders, wait staff, and entertainment. Many are dwarf-sized (former duergar). The characters can fight the skeletons if they wish, but any altercation darkens Lottie's mood when the characters finally meet her.

Each skeleton uses the normal stat block with these changes:

Map 5.2: Lottie's Palace

- It speaks Common, though its responses are programmed.
- A successful DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check notes a small clockwork device attached to the inside of a skeleton's skull that lights up when it speaks.

None of the skeletons are in a position to set up meetings with Lottie. The characters need to figure out how to get to her on their own.

Gambling Tables. All manner of games can be played at Lottie's Palace, including Three-Dragon Ante, dice, Dragonchess, roulette, blackjack, and a cutthroat roleplaying game called Papers & Paychecks. A character can play any game for a cost of 3 tokens (available from the cashier). You can use any combination of checks and roleplaying you like to represent a character's attempts to gamble, but each game should involve at least three checks of DC 12 or higher. An Intelligence (History) or Wisdom (Perception) check might allow a character to suss out the rules of a game or analyze the opposition, while an Intelligence (Investigation) or Charisma (Deception) check can represent careful play or cagey bluffing. The DC of any checks made to gamble increases by 1 for each drink a character consumes.

If a character fails all the checks for a game, they lose their 3 tokens and owe another 3. If the character fails more than half their checks, they lose their 3 tokens and owe 1 token. If they succeed on all checks, they keep their tokens and gain 2 tokens. This is a great way to lose money, but if a character beats the odds and wins more than three times in a row, the dealer for the game declares that it needs to go on its dinner break (despite being a skeleton).

Slot Machines. One side of the gambling pit features banks of strange clockwork machines, each with a large red lever and a slot for tokens. These machines promise great fun, surrounded by colorful lights and amazing sounds. They also drain an average of 3 tokens for every minute of play.

Gamblers. The inebriated patrons are too focused on their gambling to talk to any characters who aren't also in the game. A character who gambles can strike up a conversation at the table, learning three pieces of information for each game they play, chosen from the following revelations:

- Lottie's Palace has been in operation for over ten years. Before the casino was built, the cavern it was carved out of was home to a clan of duergar.
- When Lottie arrived, she offered the duergar jobs building her lair and minting tokens. When the casino was complete, Lottie fired her duergar work force but offered each of them a starter set of tokens as a severance package. The duergar took up gambling and drinking.
- Lottie employs only skeletons to work her palace, many of which were once duergar.
- Some of the duergar decided to start up a town next to the casino and sell tokens at lower cost. They took on construction loans and named their town Fortune.
- After a lot of hard work, customers of the casino began to come to Fortune to get tokens. Lottie lowered her prices in response. Fortune quickly became unable to pay its debts, and the town was abandoned.
- Lottie is not only a powerful wizard—she's a lich.
- Lottie loves clockwork. She has crafted many amazing machines, including the clockwork machine room that powers the casino.
- The machine room behind the fortified metal door controls all the clockwork devices in the casino, including the locked double doors that lead to Lottie.

Treasure. The tiny gems embedded into the ceiling are valuable if collected. With 1 minute of uninterrupted work, a character can collect 30 gp worth of gems, to a total of 3,000 gp for the entire area. The chances of the characters being able to work uninterrupted are left to your determination.

2. Cashier

A skeleton in a slinky dress behind the cashier window offers tokens for use at the tables. Each token costs 5 gp. The cashier also suggests purchasing "super lucky tokens," which function identically to normal tokens for the low, low cost of 10 gp each. The L-stamped tokens are made of copper covered with a thin layer of gold, as the characters saw with the tokens found in Horn Enclave.

The cashier accepts any form of valuables as payment (excluding IOUs), which are taken to a huge chest on the far side of the room. Any nonliving matter placed into the chest is teleported to secret vaults located in a distant land.

JARED BLANDO

3. Club Lounge

> This club lounge is clearly the place to hang out. A sign on the wall says so. Huge fish tanks feature brightly colored fish and an octopus. Soft leather chairs provide a great place to sober up or to enjoy a delicious drink at the bar.

Bartender. The skeleton bartender uses clockwork devices to shake rum drinks, peel fruit, blend fruit juices, and create souvenir flattened tokens (at a cost of 3 tokens). A door behind the bar leads to the kitchen. Characters who sit in the lounge are shown a menu whose only item is "Delicious Meals" for 3 tokens.

The bartender can be bribed (6 tokens) to let characters into the kitchen. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a brass key hanging around the bartender's neck. This opens the door to the machine room (area 5). It's possible to steal the key with a successful DC 14 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, or to sweet talk the bartender into "lending" it with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check.

Lounging Duergar. A few duergar are in the lounge, taking a break from gambling and watching the three harpist skeletons on the stage. Chatting up these duergar can provide information as in the gambling hall, at a rate of 1 token per piece of information.

4. Kitchen

Strange clockwork devices prepare food here, all of them slicing, dicing, stirring, mixing, and cleaning in a frenzy. Any character watching the process notes that the fare looks particularly unhealthy, featuring questionable meats, past-their-prime vegetables, and copious amounts of lard. Skeletons come and go to pick up food and drop off dishes. They ignore any characters who don't get in the way.

The door leading north into Lottie's domain is not locked. Lottie assumes that anyone coming this way is a staff member on legitimate business, or is looking to die.

5. Machine Room

The clockwork machinery in this area generates power for the casino and controls all the other clockwork in the place. The heavy iron door is set with a large lock and a dangerous trap, which sprays anyone who tries to pick the lock with a potent contact poison. The trap can be detected with a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) check and disarmed with a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check or Dexterity check using thieves' tools. If the lock is picked without disabling the trap, the character picking it must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The trap resets automatically.

The bartender sometimes accesses this area to adjust power levels and has the key (see area 3). Using the key

CARMEN SINEK

doesn't bypass the trap (it doesn't need to, as skeletons are immune to poison damage), but grants advantage on the saving throw when the trap is triggered.

This encounter setup assumes that the characters come here before encountering Lottie in area 8. If they've already been to the boardroom and met the lich, adjust the setup so that the clockwork behir attacks at once.

When the door is opened, read the following:

> The walls of this room are covered in conduits and glowing panels, many of which leak green fluid that flows toward a grated drain on the floor. In the center of the room stands a large glass globe on a stone pedestal. A brilliant ball of light pulses within the globe, which roils with dark energy bearing a disturbing resemblance to a map of the world.
>
> Coiled around the globe is a long, serpentine creature that resembles a cross between a centipede and a crocodile—and which is made entirely of clockwork. It begins to move, but of more immediate notice is the translucent illusion of a lich in an evening gown lounging on a couch at the far side of the room. She wears an eyepatch and strokes a contented-looking dog as she speaks.
>
> "So, you thought to enter my palace and rob me, did you? Let's make it interesting, then. See if you can convince me to spare you before my clockwork pet destroys you all!" The lich laughs as the clockwork creature lunges toward you.

Creature. The clockwork behir uses the **behir** stat block with these changes:

- It is a construct.
- It has immunity to poison and psychic damage.
- It has immunity to the charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, and poisoned conditions, and to exhaustion.

The clockwork behir does its best to destroy the characters, and continues fighting even after Lottie's illusion departs (see below).

Any character fighting the clockwork behir can see that the complex arrangement of its workings gives it a unique vulnerability. Any character within 5 feet of the construct can use an action to attempt a DC 14 Dexterity check using jeweler's tools or thieves' tools. On a success, the behir takes 15 bludgeoning damage as it components start to grind, and it is no longer able to recharge its lightning breath.

Illusory Lottie. Lottie, her couch, and her dog are all a projected illusion. The lich nonetheless behaves like a classic villain, and is keen to reveal secrets during the battle if the characters try to explain themselves or do a deal with her. She is generally forthright in her answers (because she's proud of her brilliance and expects the characters to die), revealing any of the following information:

- Lottie created the orrery and its components, but she quickly grew to regret having done so, since the artifact could destroy the world if used improperly.
- When she realized how dangerous the orrery was, Lottie scattered its pieces and left the message in Horn Enclave that brought the characters here.
- She is aware that the orrery's components have been coming together, and that all the missing components and the orrery housing have now been found.
- She knows that the Six wants the orrery. That organization has bargained with terrible powers, which have instructed them in how to use the orrery and its components to open a portal to the Far Realm.
- If the portal is opened, the world will likely be destroyed. A shame, really, because Faerûn is such a profitable place.
- Even if the Six don't have all the orrery components, they'll be able to start their ritual given enough time, tapping into the power of the Far Realm from somewhere in the material world.
- Lottie would totally love to save the world, but she's in the middle of a retreat and completely busy. It's a lot of work keeping all these liches happy.

When the characters have learned all you want them to (or if they start to get the upper hand against the clockwork behir), Lottie ends the conversation by saying, "Oh, I'm terribly sorry. I have an appointment. I must go. Have fun dying!" Her illusion then fades.

Wreaking Havoc. Talking to Lottie and not getting killed is the major point of this area. But characters who defeat the behir can remove the panels to access the clockwork machinery here. With a little experimentation, characters can deactivate any of the machinery in the casino, including the locks on the double doors into area 6. At your determination, tearing down the panels and attacking the clockwork behind them can have the same effect.

6. Swimming Pool

The double doors to this huge chamber are covered in clockwork that functions as a lock. A successful DC 20 Dexterity check using jeweler's tools or thieves' tools unlocks the door. The characters can also open the doors from the machine room, or can use the kitchen to access this area. The skeleton staff in the front areas of the casino assume that anyone entering Lottie's private domain is either invited or is soon to be dead, and pay no mind to characters breaking in.

> The floor of this room is covered in red tiles surrounding a large swimming pool, the bottom of which glitters with thousands of gems. Fountains around the room spray water into the air that hangs as a fine mist.

Unlocked double doors across from the pool lead out to a hallway, while smaller doors lead to Lottie's office and to a changing room stocked with swim suits sized for every type of humanoid creature.

Creatures. A **water elemental** and a **water weird** lurk in the pool. If any creature enters the room and doesn't

throw a token into one of the fountains within 1 round, the creatures attack. The water elemental enjoys taking grappled creatures into the pool so that the water weird can play with them.

Treasure. Flecks of gemstone embedded into the bottom of the pool are valuable if collected. With 1 minute of uninterrupted work, a character can collect 10 gp worth of gems, to a total of 1,000 gp for the entire pool.

7. Office

Lottie's books are here—both those she likes to read and her financial records for the gambling hall. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check made to look through the account books reveals that several liches have invested in Lottie's business. If the check is 18 or higher, it becomes clear that Lottie keeps two sets of records—one that she discloses to her investors showing lower profits, and one she keeps to herself with the true profits. If used carefully, this information could let the characters blackmail the lich.

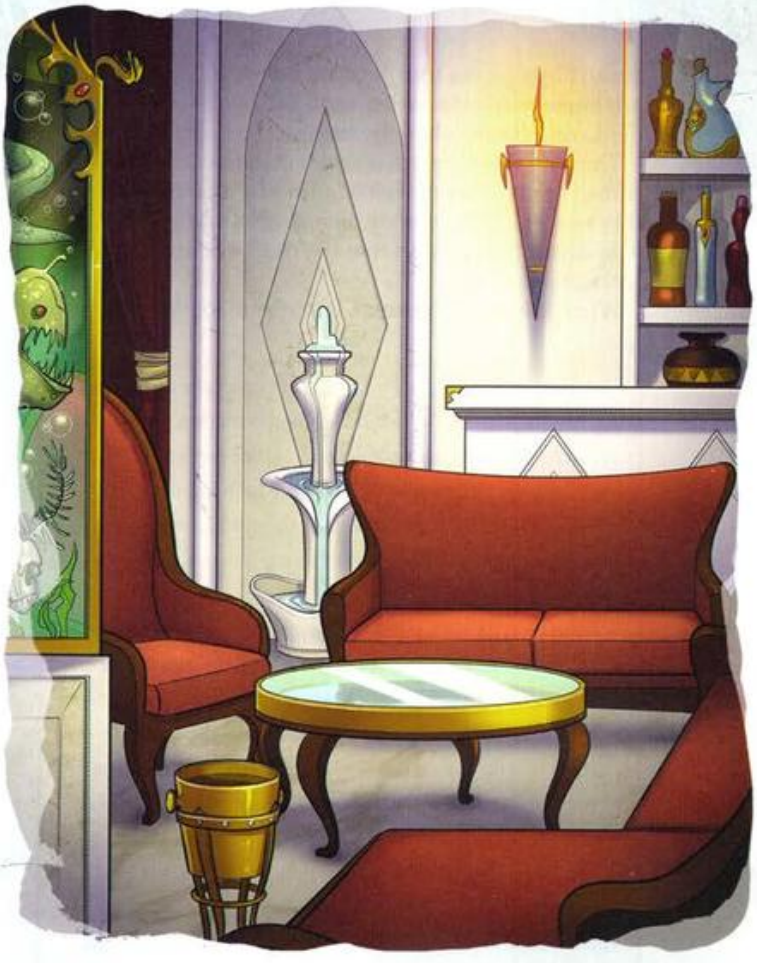
This area can also contain other information of your choosing about the Six or the *Orrery of the Wanderer*. If the characters have missed out on any key revelations up to now, or are having trouble with certain plot points, you can clear them up here and set the stage for a final question-and-answer session in the boardroom.

8. Boardroom

> Large clockwork double doors open by themselves as you approach, revealing a luxurious room decorated with fine art, rich carpets, several leather couches, and a boardroom table. Crystal balls sitting on pedestals around the room flicker and glow, and a huge fish tank swarms with unusual creatures. Some of them are even alive.
>
> Nine liches occupy the room, either lounging around or arguing at the table. All wear leisure suits or sun dresses, including one sitting comfortably with a dog in her lap. All appear surprised to see you.

This area is Lottie's public and personal space, with a private bedroom adjoining the swanky boardroom. Eight of the nine **liches** are here on an annual retreat, taking a break from the various exploitative and profitable enterprises they run back home. Lottie is the ninth lich. This year was her turn to host, and she's regretted every minute of it so far. It's a lot of pressure dealing with these high-powered undead.

Negotiating with the Liches. Lottie (surprised that the characters survived her clockwork behir if they went that way before coming here) wants to disintegrate the characters immediately and says so. However, two liches lounging on couches are bored to the point of seeking any distraction, and they urge Lottie to let the characters speak. Allow the characters to explain why they have come, and to plead the case for receiving the information they need and the last orrery component. You can ask for Charisma (Persuasion) checks to carry the conversation, or let good roleplaying rule.



If the characters haven't encountered the illusory Lottie in area 5, the revelations in that section can be moved here, revealed by Lottie or the other liches. Some of the other liches have heard rumors of the Six's plots, and that the Six have seemingly bargained with terrible powers to learn how to use the orrery components to open a portal to the Far Realm. The commercial interests of these liches means that all understand how destroying the world is bad for business, so the Six must be stopped.

The Orrery. If the characters convince Lottie that their goals are to end the orrery's threat and save the world, she shares any information regarding the artifact that the characters don't already know. She then provides them with the last orrery component, called the *wheel of stars*. Lottie underscores the importance of the characters stopping the Six and preventing that group from opening a portal to the Far Realm. The means by which they do so are entirely up to them. But whatever the outcome of the battle with the Six, Lottie insists that the orrery must be broken up and never used again—and sets a very real threat of dark destruction on the characters if they fail to permanently disable the relic.

Franchise Opportunity. The bored liches' thirst for entertainment might inspire them to ask the characters about what they do—and about Acquisitions Incorporated. Like Lottie, all these undead are focused on the limitless commercial aspects of immortal evil, and might be talked into partnerships with the franchise. The potential for such deals (and the potential risks

in dealing with such powerful entities) is left to your imagination.

Taking Leave of Lottie

Depending on how their dealings with the liches go (and whether they did any damage to Lottie's Palace while getting to her), the characters can spend a few hours hanging out with the undead. Any prospective business dealings can be lined up, after which the liches order one last round of drinks, then kick the characters out of Lottie's Palace.

Conclusion

With the events of this episode complete, the characters attain 6th level! Leaving Lottie's Palace behind, they can return safely to their borrowed battle balloon or mobile headquarters, ready to try to figure out where the Six might be conducting their ritual—and how to stop it.

Franchise Downtime

Much of the break between episode 5 and 6 will be focused on determining the location of the Six's ritual site. The key clue to doing so is knowing that the ritual needs to be undertaken in a location where the planar boundaries are already thin, and where an existing planar portal is likely already in operation. Still, though the end of the world might be nigh, on the off chance that the characters are successful in stopping the Six's plans, they'll have bills to pay.

All the activities mentioned in this section are introduced or talked about in the "Franchise Tasks and Downtime" section in chapter 2.

Locating the Ritual Site

As the endgame approaches, the time the characters have spent with the orrery and its component pieces can grant the necessary insight to build a detector that can sense portals or planar disturbances. A portalometer, if you will. The research or scrutineering activities can help the characters uncover the necessary information or tools, while the crafting a magic item activity can cover the construction of the portalometer.

The details of the portalometer are left to the imaginations of the players (including coming up with a better name if they like). The detector might take the form of a magical receptacle allowing one or more orrery components to function as a compass, a divination window tapping into planar disruptions to show brief glimpses of possible locations, or any other device channeling suitable magic.

If you really want to dig deep, you could experiment with the idea that the orrery's power gives it a kind of consciousness (or you could even make it a sentient magic item, as detailed in chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.) In that scenario, the orrery's consciousness might be what the portalometer taps into. Or the orrery components possessed by the Six might begin to call to the components held by the characters, as the artifact seeks to be made whole once more.

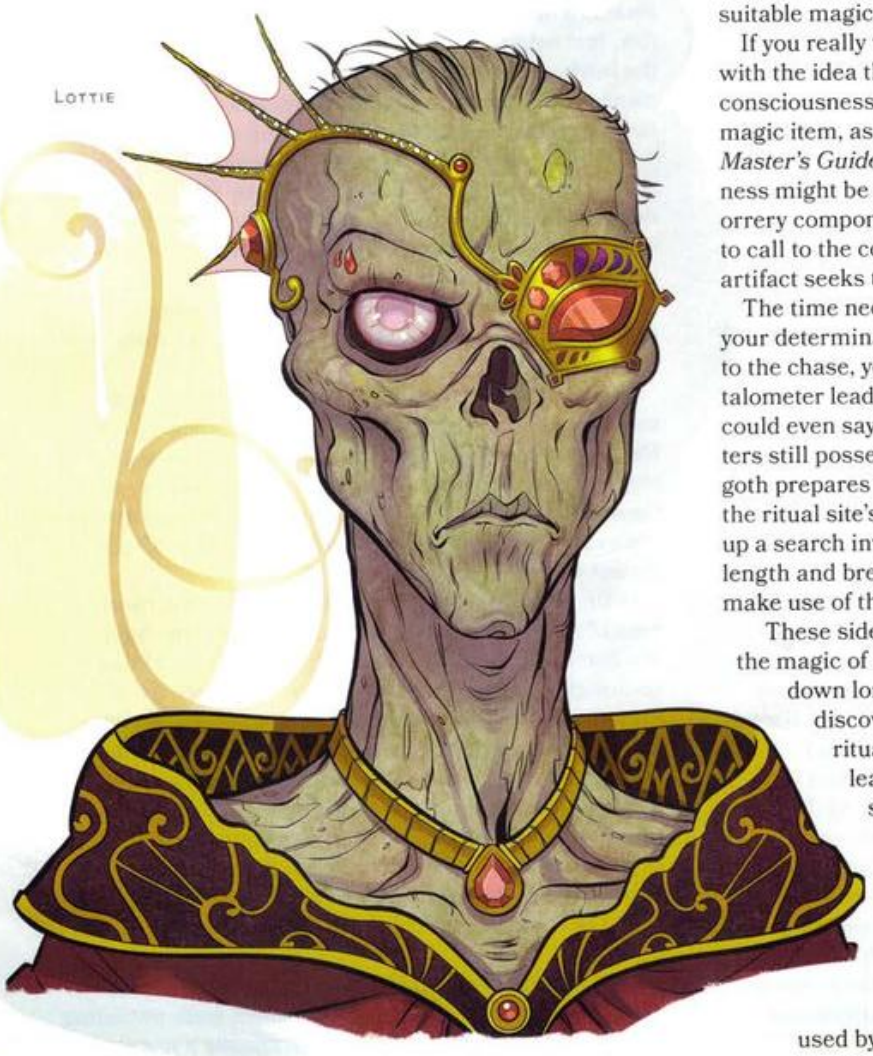
The time necessary to locate the ritual site is left to your determination. If the characters are anxious to cut to the chase, you can have a successfully created portalometer lead them straight to the site. In a pinch, you could even say that any orrery components the characters still possess become attuned to the ritual as Splugoth prepares it, allowing the characters to triangulate the ritual site's location. For more build up, you can set up a search involving side treks, which might cover the length and breadth of the Sword Coast as the characters make use of their mobile franchise headquarters.

These side trek missions might tie in to improving the magic of the portalometer and involving tracking down lore or components. Or the characters could discover several possible locations for the Six's ritual, then investigate and eliminate false leads before finding the real site. One such side trek is detailed in "The Moon Glade" in episode 6, and you can add similar events as you wish.

Seeking the Six

Any number of downtime and franchise activities—from research to schmoozing to shady business practices—can be used by characters seeking to learn more about

Lottie



the ritual or how best to take the fight to the Six. For any tasks in which the outcome includes a complication due to a rival, the Six could be attempting to undermine the characters' franchise to eliminate their threat.

Business as Usual

Even as the characters are working on locating the ritual site, they might use the explore territory franchise activity to interact with local customers and allies to strengthen the franchise. A group of merchants might want to sell branded gear manufactured by the liches the characters met at Lottie's, creating additional business opportunities or allowing the characters to follow up on previous negotiations with the liches.

Franchise Restructuring

Having recently interacted with several powerful organizations—including Lottie's lich alliance, the Six, and Dran Enterprises—the characters might be bursting with ideas for fine-tuning their franchise and headquarters before the final showdown. This might involve organizational restructuring, headquarters modifications, upgraded magic, and other activities meant to grant the franchise an edge in the coming fight.

Meet and Greet

Engaging in shady business practices or outright crime during downtime might result in more than financial reward for the characters. With a suitable degree of success, such activities can bring the characters into contact with agents of the Six. Likewise, the characters might use the cover of criminal activity to infiltrate or expose the Six, or they could use carousing or other social activities to contact an ally or operative of the organization.

Any such interactions should automatically create complications to be resolved, with those complications revealing useful information concerning the Six's plots, the ritual site's possible location, and the defenses around the site.

Continuing the Adventure

If the characters communicate with Head Office at any point during their downtime, it should be made clear that Acquisitions Incorporated is impressed by the franchise's success. Omin Dran does whatever he can to backstop the characters' efforts to find the ritual site, even as he directs other franchises and operatives to seek the site as well. (In the end, the characters will conveniently be the ones to locate the ritual site, but it should be clear that the entire organization takes the impending end of the world as seriously as they do.)

Omin is also troubled because he's lost contact with the members of the "C" Team (see appendix A). The members of that franchise have been actively seeking the Six, and Omin hopes that they might simply be in the midst of an operation with no chance to report in. But just in case, he asks the characters to keep an eye out for them. The fate of the "C" Team—and the possible fate of all Faerûn—will be revealed to the characters as they charge toward the grand finale of the adventure!

Episode 6: Showdown with the Six

The characters (now 6th level) have learned that the *Orrery of the Wanderer* channels magic even more powerful than intended by its creator, the lich Lottie. As such, Lottie broke the orrery into parts and scattered those parts far and wide, hoping that no one would discover their secret. But the enigmatic group known as the Six has collected at least one orrery component (perhaps more, depending on events in episode 5), and its agents now attempt to use those components to open a portal to the Far Realm.

After a suitable amount of questing and research, the characters locate the ritual site, which they learn is in the small town of Red Larch. That settlement is the childhood home of Omin Dran and the stomping grounds of the Acquisitions Incorporated franchise known as the "C" Team, whose members have recently gone missing.

The characters speed toward Red Larch, where they find foes allied with the Six guarding the Dran & Courtier inn. That otherwise quiet establishment has always possessed unusual magical qualities, but these have been warped by the slowly opening portal to the Far Realm. The characters can interact with the local townsfolk, learning that the members of the "C" Team entered the inn but have not returned. Likewise, the inn's co-owner and proprietor, Propha Dran, has not been seen since the planar strangeness suffusing the inn started.

When the characters enter, the Dran & Courtier appears normal at first. But opening any of its interior doors causes the entire site to transform under the watchful eye of an agent of the Six known as the Keymaster. A nightmare version of the Dran & Courtier is revealed, filled with aberrant horrors. Defeating the horrors of this incarnation of the inn returns the characters to the actual inn.

A second transformation turns the characters into miniature heroes as they are greeted by Splugoth the Returned. On behalf of the Six, the wily goblin asks the characters to surrender their orrery components—and then releases Onyx, the giant (relative to the characters) inn's cat, upon them. Successfully fleeing from Onyx transforms the inn once more.

In the final stage, the characters discover the members of the "C" Team fallen in combat and must fight the horrid Far Realm creature that slew them. Doing so brings those NPC heroes back to life. Once the Keymaster has been subsequently bested, the characters can open a final door leading to a dark series of dimensional caverns—and the lair of an ancient deep crow. That terrible creature is sure to defeat the characters, unless they can determine that it's suffering from a deep depression and desperately seeks a mate. Successfully playing the part of deep crow relationship counselor allows the characters to continue on, finally reaching the portal site.

Splugoth is in control of the ritual and has defenses in place to prevent the meddling characters from thwarting his plans. As the characters face off against a mutated

The Dran & Courtier

Far Realm goblin horde, Splugoth's control of the orrery components that fuel the ritual lets him summon forth twisted, evil versions of some of Acquisitions Incorporated's most famous members. Oh, and there's a thing where the ritual keeps resurrecting Splugoth every time the characters kill him.

In the end, clever thinking and a measure of luck might allow the heroes to keep Splugoth dead, seize control of the orrery components, and end the ritual. If victorious, the characters will earn accolades from Head Office for a job well done!

And the world will be safe from destruction. That's always a plus.

Seeking the Ritual Site

In the course of locating the ritual site (see "Franchise Downtime" in episode 5), the characters might travel to any number of locations, either to confirm that those locations are not the ritual site or to gain additional information or magic useful in the search for the real site. If you want to set up a prolonged search for the site, any of the following iconic locations along the Sword Coast might make an interesting stop for the characters. Each location offers the potential to gain information regarding sites known for planar disturbances or strange magic, or to seek lore and materials to refine the operation of the characters' portalometer.

Candlekeep

The many towers of the largest and most storied library in all Faerûn are the perfect place to search for clues leading to the location or nature of the ritual site, or to find instructions for crafting a portalometer. Gaining lore or befriending the monks of the library could reveal that someone else recently came to Candlekeep to inquire into the nature of portals to other dimensions. In fact, this representative of the Six was studying the very tomes the characters are now investigating!

To dial up the action in an otherwise studious scene, remember that research in Candlekeep is never entirely safe. Opening a particular book might lead to a pocket dimension, conjure up a fiend, or create any other distraction of your design. More information on Candlekeep can be found in the *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*.

Mantol-Derith

Duergar, drow, and svirfneblin trade and exchange information in the city of Mantol-Derith deep in the Underdark. A deep gnome sage named Lunicifer dwells in the city, living in a crumbling home on the shores of the Darklake. A half-mad servant of a forgotten deity named Azmekidom, Lunicifer has been researching planar disturbances for more than a century and can provide the characters with insight or research—if the party helps him with his dangerous errands. These

Klaus Pillon

side trek missions might include stealing a magic item from a drow noble house, gathering unique fungus from a mind flayer's garden, and other potentially deadly tasks. More information on Mantol-Derith can be found in *Out of the Abyss* and the *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*.

Neverwinter

Depending on how much time the characters spent in Neverwinter in episode 3, they might have heard tales of how the Spellplague (the great magical devastation that tore across Faerûn more than a century ago) tore a large chasm through the city. This chasm (helpfully known as "the Chasm") has since been sealed, but pockets of blue spellfire and the warping effects of planar energy can often still be seen in the area.

The characters can make use of contacts from episode 3 to determine that agents of the Six appeared recently in Neverwinter and were rumored to have been researching the magic of the Chasm. Tracking down any agents who remain might allow the characters to gain hints regarding the ritual's location. You might also decide that these Six agents have been warped by the latent energy of the Chasm, making them formidable and unpredictable foes.

More information on Neverwinter can be found in the *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*.

Kryptgarden Forest

This dread forest abutting the Sword Mountains is the demesne of the ancient green dragon Claugiyliamatar. That terrible and cruel beast—known as Old Gnawbone for her habit of flying over the forest with a corpse in her jaws as a light snack—has long dominated Kryptgarden with her evil presence.

The forest is also home to a dryad named Ishaldra, who studies how evil magic can alter locations in the world. She can help the characters learn how to detect powerful magical essences, but only if they can elude Claugiyliamatar and the other dark creatures that dwell within the forest.

More information on Kryptgarden and Claugiyliamatar can be found in the adventures *Princes of the Apocalypse* and *Storm King's Thunder*.

The Moon Glade

This section expands on one location the characters might journey to as part of their search for the Six's ritual site.

Research and Requisitions

As the characters work to perfect their portalometer, they hear of a site deep in the High Forest not far from the Star Mounds, known as the Moon Glade. The waters of the Moon Glade rest upon an intersection of magical ley lines, tied to the weave of the world. The glade's waters are thick like mercury and said to have powerful properties of divination. The characters might also learn that the glade is protected by a powerful natural guardian. Or you could keep that information to yourself.

Investigating the Glade

The characters can use their mobile headquarters to reach the Moon Glade easily enough. When they finally arrive at the site, read the following:

> The Moon Glade is a secluded clearing, roughly eighty feet in diameter, with half that space taken up by the pool of water at its center. Huge ancient trees around the perimeter tower overhead, allowing only a narrow slice of sky to illuminate the pool's silvery surface. The pool is surrounded by a circle of huge standing stones, all inscribed with strange writing.

Inscribed Stones. Anyone able to read Druidic can read the writing on the stones, all of which makes reference to divination and magic. The stones of the pool were brought here by visiting druids using large beasts or magical transportation, but any magic they might possess is dormant during this encounter.

Tainted Guardian. The Moon Glade is protected by Garalel, a weeping willow **treant**. She is cantankerous and ancient, and presently has iconic affiliate of the Six features (see "Iconic Faction Features" in appendix B). Garalel became tainted by the Six when Splugoth and other members of that organization recently used the pool to seek out their ritual site.

Garalel initiates combat by animating trees, following up with her Glimpse of the Beyond feature. Characters can see that her bark is covered in dark, foul-smelling moss. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check identifies the bark as magically tainted. Dealing damage to Garalel harms her but also breaks off large pieces of the tainted bark and moss. When she is reduced to 30 hit points or fewer, enough corrupted bark has been sloughed off that the treant regains her senses and stops fighting.

A character can also use an action to throw water from the pool onto Garalel. Each time she is splashed so, it helps cleanse the dark magic binding her and increases the hit point total at which she regains her senses by 10.

If Garalel regains her senses, she apologizes profusely. She allows the characters to approach the pool and tells them how the members of the Six used its waters to determine the ideal location for a dark ritual. Knowing that their actions contaminated the pool, she drew that corruption into herself instead.

Completing the Mission

What the characters get out of this side trek depends on where it fits in the longer process of perfecting a portalometer or eliminating possible ritual sites. Depending on the goal, Garalel can allow the characters to use the pool's divination power to seek the ritual site, to take a sample of the glade's magical waters for use in their portalometer, or what have you.

Mission to Red Larch

At whatever point in the search process you deem appropriate, the characters narrow down the search for the ritual site to a final location: the settlement of Red Larch on the western side of the Dessarin Valley. This small town services passing caravans and has a large quarry from which local folk mine marble favored by the wealthy of Waterdeep. A wagon can reach Waterdeep from Red Larch in seven days, and the town of Phandalin is six days away on foot.

Red Larch is also the hometown of Omin Dran and the location of the Dran family business—the Dran & Courtier inn and restaurant. As the characters soon discover, this is not a coincidence. The *Princes of the Apocalypse* adventure contains more information on Red Larch and the surrounding region. As with Phandalin, this version of Red Larch is set about five years later than that earlier adventure.

How the characters arrive in Red Larch is likely determined by what they suspect or have learned regarding the defenses the Six have set up around the ritual. They might choose a stealthy incursion in the dead of night, to roar straight in aboard a mobile franchise headquarters at midday, or any approach in between. But however they first enter the town, the characters quickly confirm that the Six's ritual is already underway.

> Something is seriously wrong in Red Larch. The Dran & Courtier inn can be seen at the crossroads near the center of town easily enough. But the beams of purple energy emanating from the establishment are decidedly unusual, as is the presence of frightened townsfolk corralled in a pen nearby. Then, of course, there's the small force of bugbears guarding the pen and the gnolls surrounding the inn. That doesn't look right at all.

The amount of time the characters spend skulking around town is up to them. Each time they investigate a feature noted below, roll a d10. On a roll of 1, a patrol of two **nothics** working for the Six attempts to ambush the party from the cover of nearby buildings, attacking with surprise if not seen.

Corralled Townsfolk

Twenty locals have been gathered by Six operatives in a fenced-in yard behind Ironhead Arms, a shop selling new and used weapons and armor. Three townsfolk are currently plotting an escape, but they fear that the other captured folk are not prepared for battle. The three are the shop's owner Ironhead (NG male half-orc **veteran**), the town's constable Harburk (LG male human **veteran**), and an explorer from out of town named Silvana (CG female human **scout**). The three work with any characters who help defend the townsfolk.

Guarding the yard are ten **bugbears** that have been instructed to safeguard the prisoners—but only because it isn't clear to Splugoth whether the ritual might eventually require humanoid sacrifices. The bugbears are focused on watching their captives, and have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to notice anyone approaching them. If the characters free the captives, Ironhead, Harburk, and Silvana offer to lead the other townsfolk to safety.

North Side of Town

Though these shops and houses look deserted at first, the characters catch periodic glimpses of frightened townsfolk peering through shuttered windows, or hear them trying to barricade doors with furniture. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check or good roleplaying can convince the locals to share what they know.

One of the NPCs the characters could meet is Imdarr Relvaunder (LN male human **priest**). Imdarr is hiding with four other townsfolk (male and female **commoners**). He won't leave the others, but he casts any of his useful spells on the adventurers if he believes they are earnest about helping Red Larch.

South Side of Town

As described above, characters can spot frightened townsfolk within the houses and other buildings, and can question them with appropriate Charisma checks or roleplaying. Scouting around the area also reveals the odd sight of an unconscious bugbear wrapped up in a floral print dress.

Approaching the bugbear draws the attention of Haeleeya Hanadroum (NG female human **commoner**), who is holed up in her bathhouse and dress shop. Haeleeya knocked the bugbear unconscious after winning an unlikely battle against it by dropping flowerpots on its head from the second-story landing. She tied it up in several of her dresses, and is now wondering what to do with it.

Haeleeya is glad to hand the characters her captive bugbear, which is happy to tell the characters everything it knows in exchange for staying alive. It tells how the bugbears were employed by the Six and ordered to round up twenty captives in case the Six needed them for some ritual, though it knows nothing more than that.

The Dran & Courtier

> As you draw closer, you see the sign marking the Dran & Courtier swinging slowly despite the absence of any breeze. Purple light continues to seep out through roof tiles, shuttered windows, and the closed front door.

Even in daylight, the building is shrouded by shadows, as if every part of the inn is somehow in the shade. Ringing the building are twenty **gnolls**, arranged in four packs of five. Even the fearless gnolls are weirded out by the strange lights emanating from the inn. The characters can engage the gnolls head-on or attempt to take them out stealthily. Because the mercenaries are on edge, they can be easily distracted by a fire, recruiting NPCs to draw them off, illusions, or other clever strategies.

Once the gnolls have been dealt with, the characters are free to enter the Dran & Courtier. The incursion of

Map 6.1: The Dran & Courtier

the inn and restaurant plays out as four distinct stages, each channeling a unique version of the establishment—and forcing the characters to face off against the effects of the dark magic churning within.

Stage 1: The Dran & Courtier?

The Dran & Courtier is normally a fine inn run by Prophetess "Propha" Dran, who happens to be Omin Dran's mother, and her wife, Audra Courtier. The inn is a favorite of locals and travelers alike, but it also serves another purpose. When someone carrying an acorn whose cap is dipped in gold (usually given to them by Acquisitions Incorporated Head Office) passes through the door, they end up in an extradimensional version of the inn known as the Test Market.

The Test Market is meant to test new recruits to Acquisitions Incorporated, and it has several known versions. The multifaceted extradimensional nature of the Dran & Courtier makes it an ideal location for the *Orrery of the Wanderer* to channel the extraplanar magic of the Six's ritual. A convenient number of days before the characters discovered the portal site, Splugoth accessed the extradimensional space and began the process of opening the portal. Energy from the Far Realm has infused several versions of the Test Market, making them even more dangerous than usual—including one version that has already defeated the "C" Team.

Map 6.1 shows the layout of this episode's Test Market versions of the Dran & Courtier.

The Keymaster's Plans

One of the seemingly ordinary inhabitants of the inn is an agent of the Six. Known as the Keymaster, the agent is a doppelganger presently posing as Prophetess "Propha" Dran (see area 3). The doppelganger holds a portal key that allows it to select which version of the Test Market the characters access when they open one of the inn's interior doors. It does so in the hope of destroying anyone attempting to interfere with Splugoth's ritual.

The Keymaster runs the characters through new versions of the warped Test Market until its identity is discovered. Once caught, the Keymaster can be forced to open the inn's basement door—revealing the dimensional caverns leading to the ritual site.

Advancing to Stage 2 and Beyond

Until the characters confront the Keymaster, they advance to the next stage of the Test Market every time they open a door within the default version of the inn. Opened doors remain open, so the characters can explore the rooms beyond when they return from whatever stage is triggered by opening the door. Any treasure or other objects claimed in a stage stay with the characters.

The Test Market is not advanced when NPCs open the doors, since the Keymaster has control of the inn's magic. As such, the NPCs stuck in the main stage (see below) wander around the inn as they please. If calculating characters think to have an NPC open a door for them, it advances the Test Market to the next stage for them only, plus any NPCs that appear in the next stage.

JARED BLANDO

Stop by the Dran & Courtier if you're ever in Red Larch. In late summer, preferably. Come hungry.
—Omin Dran

Propha Dran

1. Main Door

The inn's windows, chimneys, and other access points are all magically sealed. They cannot be opened from inside or out, and are impervious to spells and damage. The main door opens easily, but a wall of purple light blocks the view inside. Characters must step through the door to take stock of what lies beyond.

The door of the Dran & Courtier is neither locked nor trapped—though the building emanates strange sounds, shakes as though it's falling apart, and continues to radiate a strange purple energy. As soon as you step through the door, though, all the strangeness stops.

You see a perfectly ordinary inn, its common room featuring five round tables. Two of those tables are occupied by typical patrons, while two other people stand at the bar. A sleek house cat sizes you up as it paces across the floor, stalking some unseen prey. Oddly, the interior space of the inn seems slightly out of sync with the exterior—almost as if you've stepped into somewhere else. But even as you ponder this, the front door closes behind you, and you notice everyone in the inn glance your way expectantly.

The door closes behind the characters as soon as they are all inside. Powerful magic imbued into the door makes it impossible to hold it open, as it pushes anything blocking it out of the way. Characters attempting to hold the door become suddenly distracted, unable to remember why they were doing so. Characters who refuse to enter the inn feel oddly compelled to move forward. Just get everyone inside. You'll make it work.

Once closed, the door cannot be opened or damaged. Teleportation and other modes of extradimensional travel fail in the Dran & Courtier, and magic cannot be used to view or communicate with the outside world.

Door Magic. If the characters open any of the interior doors of the Dran & Courtier, it advances the Test Market to the next stage. When this happens the first time, see the section "Stage 2: Little Inn of Horrors" below. See also "Advancing to Stage 2 and Beyond" above.

2. Common Room

Two male humans are quietly eating a meal at one of the common room tables, while a young male and female human and an elderly female human sit at another. A fireplace occupies the corner closest to the door, burning brightly, and a chandelier above the common room provides additional light from its tall candles. Hanging over the fireplace is a portrait of three children, two female and one male. The male is clearly a young Omin Dran.

Next to the fireplace is an unoccupied raised stage where a bard might strike up a tune. The bar is to your left, where a half-elf in a heavy leather duster receives a drink from a tall female elf wearing a gold medallion. Stairs beyond the bar lead up to a balcony on the second floor. Eight doors along the open upstairs hallways likely lead to bedrooms.

The characters can explore the common room and speak to any patrons they wish.

Long Lunch. The table farthest from the door is occupied by Sigil MacFinn, a tall and strong wagon worker, and his squat friend, a carpenter who goes by the name of Whiskey (both N male human **guards**). The two are complete opposites: Sigil composed and pleasant, Whiskey uncouth and short-tempered. They have been in the inn's restaurant for a long time. The outside doors simply don't work for them. However, they enjoy the free food, and as long as they aren't speaking to each other,

The following official Acquisitions Incorporated beers are now available for resale (at regular wholesale discounts) and for franchise parties (at full cost; less drinking, more working, okay?): War Priest Dark Ale • Red Larch Regular • Velvet Curtain • Waelvur's Wood Stain • Lord's Favor • Little Dagger • Mother Tongue • Cold Comfort • Summer Gold • Widow's Wake

they get along well. When someone talks to them, their contrasting personalities erupt and arguments break out. They go back to being quiet and happy if left alone.

Anyone making it through the arguments can learn that these two came in for lunch one day and have never left (they disagree as to how many days they've been here). They have seen a number of strange, shady people coming and going, including some who wore cloaks to conceal their features. The doors seemed to work for those people. They suggest speaking to Propha, the barkeep and owner, who always appears to be trying to remember something.

Reservation on Hold. The three people at the table nearest the door include Luna and Thalen (CG female and male human **commoners**), the adolescent servants of a wandering wizard named Thed. They were sent to the Dran & Courtier to reserve a room for their master, and though they keep trying to leave, the outside door doesn't open for them. Bored, they have begun to make notes of everything around them. They have noticed that the mice appear very intelligent, ably eluding the inn's resident cat, Onyx. The dark cat can be seen roaming the area periodically, and keeps an eye on a mouse hole near the fireplace. Luna and Thalen would make excellent wizard hirelings for the franchise if the characters were inclined to train them.

Also sitting at the table is the elderly Tanas (NG female human **scout**), who has been watching over the youngsters and doing her best to keep them out of trouble. All three can share that strangers come and go, with the main door always closing behind them before anyone else can get out. The strangers often head into the door to the right of the bar. Others have gone upstairs.

3. Bar

Two figures at the bar offer additional conversational possibilities—including the owner of the inn, who is not what she appears.

Diplomatic Observer. Chance (N half-elf **spy**) is a Waterdavian diplomat who has been trapped here for days. Chance has no particular use for gender, preferring to be known simply by their nickname. Chance has seen some strange people come and go, including one in cowled robes who seemed to be a mass of eyes and mouths. There was also a goblin who walked around as if he owned the place. If the characters ask, the goblin matches Splugoth's smirking, pale-eyed description.

Forgetful Owner. Prophetess "Propha" Dran, the proprietor of the Dran & Courtier, manages the bar ably, pouring drinks and bringing out platters of food (no charge). She appears oblivious to the bar's problems, as if she has never noticed them. This Propha is secretly a **doppelganger** and is also the Keymaster, though she/it pretends to be the addled owner who is trying to help the characters. When Propha is asked any questions, characters can attempt a Wisdom (Insight) check contested by the doppelganger's Charisma (Deception) check, which is usually made with advantage thanks to its Read Thoughts feature.

If the character's check fails, the character perceives that "Propha" truly wants to help the characters, but is unable to do so for some reason. The barkeep often fidgets with the medallion she wears, especially when trying to remember something. A DC 12 Intelligence (Religion) check notes that priests often wear such medallions, engraved with their holy symbol, but this one is blank.

> Running a Yum Yum Hut is the single most important moment in a person's life. It's more important than marriage or the birth of an offspring. It eclipses all other things. So when picking proper employees, I can't stress this enough—you really need to make sure they have at least six fingers.
>
> —Donaar Blit'zen

Behind the Bar. Propha keeps a supply of magic potions in tall, thin, color-coded bottles: three *potions of invisibility*, a *potion of poison*, and three potions that confer the benefit of a *greater restoration* spell. The Keymaster is aware of the potions and uses a *potion of invisibility* to get away from the characters if things go badly. See "Confronting the Keymaster" below.

4. Kitchen and Larder

The doors to this area, once opened and after the characters have returned to this scene, lead to a perpetually well-stocked kitchen. A food preparation table set with storage cabinets stands against one wall. Food is always ready on the table as if Propha had just prepared it, reappearing moments after it is served. Any common cooking ingredients and supplies, in addition to ale and wine, can be found in the adjoining larder.

5. Propha and Audra's Room

Propha and Audra's bedroom is next to the common room, so they can hear any disturbances at night.

6. Door to the Basement

A door adjacent to the bar should lead under the second-floor stairs and down into the inn's basement. Instead, anyone opening it glimpses a bricked-over doorway before the next stage is triggered. The door remains open when the characters return, but shows only a brick wall until the Keymaster opens the door, revealing the dimensional caverns leading to the ritual site.

7. Upstairs Rooms

The upstairs landing features four doors along each wall, leading into eight bedrooms. Each bedroom has another door, leading into a shared study (area 8). The door from any bedroom into the study can be accessed without triggering a new stage of the Test Market, but any door opened into a bedroom triggers a new stage.

Each of these four guest rooms is presently empty, but a search of the rooms and a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check locates a silver ring under a carpet in one room—a *ring of free action*, forgotten by a guest.

8. Shared Study

These areas connect to the four rooms adjacent to them, and contain a table, chairs, and bookshelves. The shared study connected to the "C" Team's quarters (area 9) contains books, notes, and maps related to their exploits, as well as mundane personal effects. The shared study connected to the inn's currently empty rooms con-

tains a selection of generic fiction works and travelogues detailing the Sword Coast.

9. "C" Team Quarters

The four rooms above the bar and kitchen are always rented by the "C" Team, with each room's characteristics reflecting the person renting it.

Rosie Beestinger's room has a simple floor mat used for stretching and exercises, sheaths holding maps, and a training dummy that has been beaten nearly to the breaking point.

K'thriss Drow'b has a neat room decorated in black and purple, a crystal ball that displays only a haze of smoke, and a collection of strange purple rocks.

Walnut Dankgrass's room has recycling and reuse bins, is decorated with several plants and vines, and has a stack of steamy love letters bearing the initials B.L. and a bottle of wine by the bedside table.

Donaar Blit'zen's room smells like a college dorm, has exercise equipment in one corner, three boxes of delicious snacks bearing the Big Daddy Donaar's Yum Yum Hut brand, an autographed pin-up scroll of a band named Sixty Wrong Sausages, and a wall calendar where every month bears his likeness.

Stage 2: Little Inn of Horrors

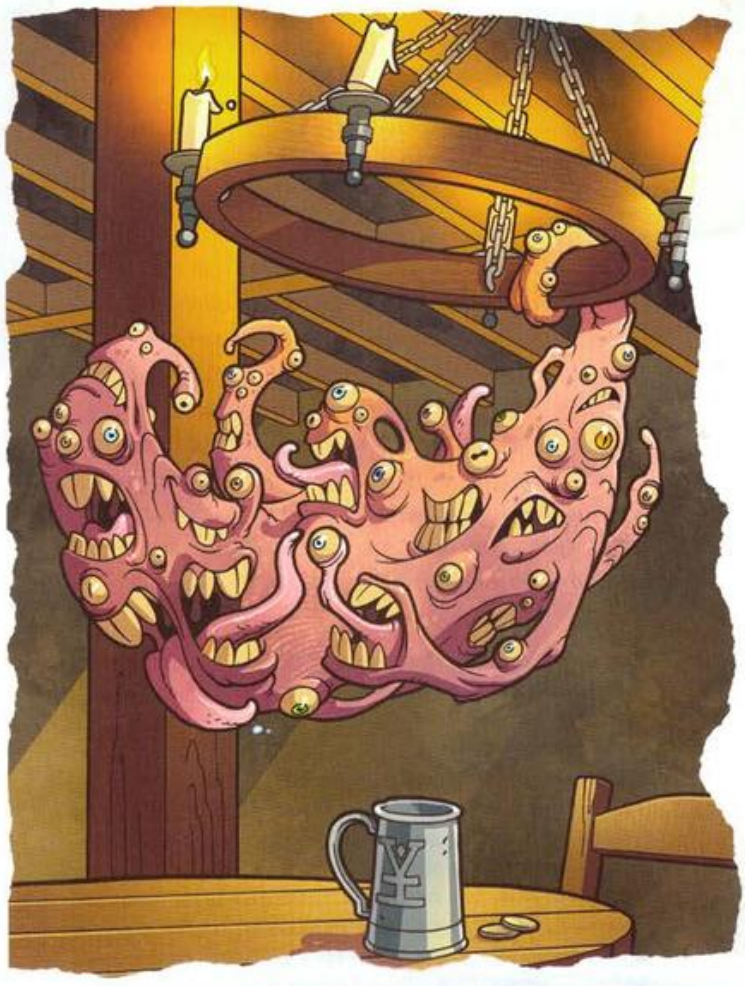
The Test Market warps reality the moment any character opens a door within the Dran & Courtier. The first time this happens, all the characters find themselves back in the common room of the inn (area 2), as if they had just walked through the main door.

> You are standing just inside the front door to the Dran & Courtier. Things are a bit different, however. The fireplace burns with purple flame. Swinging from the chandelier above the center of the common room is a red-haired figure in a green shirt and red cape. He appears to be having a grand time.
>
> Sigil the wagon worker and Whiskey the carpenter are talking and laughing in loud voices at their table, plates heaped with food before them. At their table, Luna and Thalen are taking turns prestidigitating small flames and colored lights, to the delight of Tanas. No one sits at the bar, but Propha Dran is clearing up empty glasses where the half-elf Chance was sitting before. She looks up at you and mouths the words, "Be careful." She then goes back to absentmindedly cleaning the bar.

This is a version of the Test Market where everything has gone wrong.

Not What They Seem

The figure swinging from the chandelier appears to be Viari (met at the end of episode 2)—but he and the scout Tanas are actually two **gibbering mouthers**. Illusion magic cloaks their appearance, though anyone touching them or succeeding on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check can see through the illusion. If the illusion is



detected, all the characters see the gibbering mouthers in their true forms as both creatures attack.

Luna, Thalen, Sigil, and Whiskey are hosts for four **intellect devourers**, having been overcome by those creatures' Body Thief action. Speaking to any of them and succeeding on a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check confirms that they are not themselves, as they display slightly warped personalities. The four attack when they or the gibbering mouthers are discovered (use their **guard** or **commoner** stat blocks). When a host is reduced to 0 hit points, the intellect devourer emerges and attempts to use its claws and Devour Intellect action to gain a character as a new host.

A character can regain any lost intellect with one of Propha's special *potions of greater restoration*, though the potions are present only in the default version of the Dran & Courtier (see "Stage 1").

Horrid Kitchen

When the fight is done, the characters hear noise from the kitchen.

> As the battle ends, you hear a muffled thumping sound, as if something is striking wood. The sound comes from the kitchen.

DARIEN M. A. CALVERT

The characters can safely open the door to the kitchen (and any doors in the inn other than the outside door, which still does not open). They might also explore Propha and Audra's room (finding it unremarkable) or head upstairs (see "Upstairs Bedrooms" below). Entering area 4 reveals a most macabre version of the inn's kitchen.

> The transformed kitchen's shelves contain all manner of ingredients suitable for a hag's den, including bat wings, dried lizards, and far too many humanoid skulls. A trash can stands in one corner, with a small iron-bound chest next to it. On the kitchen's preparation table sits a spectacularly long butcher's knife surrounded by severed fingers. Other equally questionable meats are arranged nearby. A pot on the stove threatens to boil over, its lid rattling. You hear the thumping noise again, coming from the cabinets underneath the preparation table.

Both the knife and the bubbling pot are dangerous, and the cabinet holds a captured flumph. At the end of each character's turn, roll a d6. On a roll of 1, the boiling pot boils over (see below).

Creature. The gleaming butcher's knife is a **mimic**. The creature waits until it is picked up to trigger its Adhesive trait. If a creature is attacked by the mimic, the boiling pot's lid comes off.

Boiling Pot. The boiling pot acts as a trap. A character examining the pot and succeeding on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check can spot glimpses of tentacles beneath the rattling lid, and notes that the lid will fly off if the pressure continues to mount. As an action, a character can attempt a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or cook's utensils to disable the pot, either by relieving the pressure safely or moving the pot off the fire without the lid coming off.

The stove has no discernible fuel source or way to turn off its heat. If the lid comes off or is removed, an explosion of tentacles and scalding water fills the kitchen. Each character in the area must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 9 (2d8) bludgeoning damage and 5 (1d10) fire damage. The trap acts on initiative count 10, repeating this effect each turn until a character uses an action to replace the lid. Even with the lid on, the pot boils over again in 1d4 rounds unless disabled, as noted above.

Cabinet. The cabinet is locked, requiring a successful DC 14 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to pick or a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check to break open. Locked inside is a **flumph** named Phfffffffft. If freed, Phfffffffft shares how it sensed the aberrant horrors in this pocket dimension and came to help, but was captured. It heard the name "Splugoth" used by some of the creatures passing through the horrid inn. Phfffffffft also recalls someone discussing a terrifying guardian that protects "the dimensional caverns." The flumph can accompany the characters back to the default Test Market if they wish, helping them as best it can in future encounters (and probably dying horribly).

Chest. The iron-bound chest has a simple lock requiring a successful DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to open, and contains packets and jars of spices. Among these is a small packet containing *dust of sneezing and choking*, another of *dust of dryness*, and a jar of *Keoghtom's ointment*.

Upstairs Bedrooms

In this version of the Test Market inn, all the rooms upstairs (areas 7 and 8) are empty except for one room of your choice. Any character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check or who has a passive Wisdom (Perception score of 12 or higher can hear slurping and chewing sounds from that area.

Creatures. Inside the room are two **chuuls**. One has grappled Chance (from area 3), and both are feasting on the unconscious half-elf spy. The chuul drops Chance as combat begins, leaving the spy unconscious with two failed death saving throws. Chance makes a death saving throw at the end of each round.

If the chuuls are defeated and Chance is saved and revived, the spy can share that they were ambushed by goblins and thrown upstairs to be eaten by the chuuls. Chance heard the goblins talking about a ritual with someone named Splugoth in charge.

Treasure. In this reality, a small chest by the bed in the chuul room contains a *rod of the pact keeper +2*.

Advancing to Stage 3

When the creatures in the common room and upstairs have been defeated, the characters feel the reality around them unravel as they are returned to the default inn of stage 1. As before, opening another door in the default version of the inn advances the characters to stage 3.

Stage 3: Feeling Small

> You are standing just inside the front door to the Dran & Courtier. The inn is seemingly deserted—or not. No one is in sight, but you see food and drink moving on several tables. A mug is lifted as if to an unseen mouth. A chair shifts like someone's leaning back in it. But there's no one there.
>
> Suddenly, the ceiling begins to rise away from you. Then you notice that the closest table is growing, as are the floor boards beneath your feet. The entire inn is expanding—or maybe you're shrinking. Assuming the rest of the inn is its usual size, by the time the effect stops, you are each no more than six inches tall.

The characters and all their equipment are reduced in size by the magic of the Test Market. This version of the inn is, in fact, empty, but the objects in it continue to move as if manipulated by creatures.

Allow the characters some time to explore their new environment. They can use ropes to climb tables or chairs, avoid chunks of discarded food the size of their heads, and see the inn from an entirely different per-

spective. They cannot detect any magical effect upon themselves that could be ended, and the resizing appears permanent.

Splugoth's Bargain

When the characters have had a bit of time to adjust to their diminutive state, read:

> A loud voice calls from above, dripping with disdain. "Hello there, members of Acquisitions Incorporated!" Peering through the rails of the second-floor balcony is a smirking goblin with one pale eye who towers over you in your present forms. "Listen up, bugs! And welcome to the most important bargaining session of your lives." The goblin walks haughtily toward the stairs. "I am Splugoth the Returned. Surely you know who I am?"

Splugoth can't conceal being pleased if the characters know that he once worked with Acquisitions Incorporated. In fact, he is enraged if they do not know his past. He fills in the details as needed, underscoring the travesty of his treatment from his own biased perspective. The goblin approaches the characters and takes a seat at a table where he can see them. Use the following possible dialogue to guide the conversation:

- "I was a young, up-and-coming goblin. Like any other goblin, filled with hopes and dreams."
- "A sorcerer named Kalarel employed me and other goblins to harry townsfolk while they opened a portal trying to free a Shadowfell death god. Look, it was work."
- "Acquisitions Incorporated foiled Kalarel's plans. Sure, partly due to a bargain I forged with Acquisitions Incorporated. But I was left to die all alone when one of Omin Dran's friends was in trouble. Death is overrated."
- "Fortunately, there are real heroes, and they hate Acquisitions Incorporated! Jeff Magic, an awesome lich who was also betrayed by Jim and Omin, resurrected me. Now I'm Splugoth the Returned! I've been given real responsibilities, including coordinating goblin raids. Goblins just attacking here or there? Oh, you have no idea. We have big plans. It's all coming together, you'll see."
- "And now I have my greatest responsibility: crushing Acquisitions Incorporated once and for all."

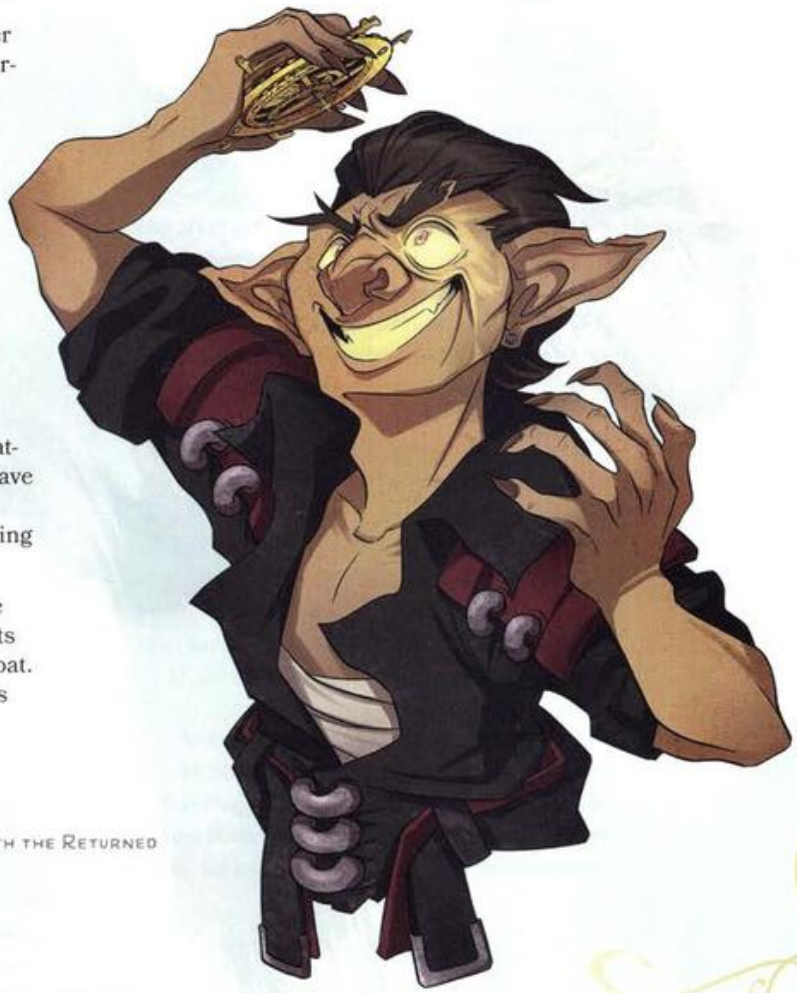
If Splugoth was ridiculously successful in episode 5 and the Six now possess all the orrery components except the *wheel of stars*, he's mostly just here to gloat. But no matter how many components the characters still possess, he offers the following sweet deal.

> "See, you must know that I'm all about business—something Omin and Jim were too blind to see. This, between you and me? It's not personal. It's commerce. I can make you a deal. You give me your orrery components, and I let you live. We both profit. Easy, right?"

Splugoth laughs darkly if the characters are foolish enough to give him their orrery components (which resize when he takes them), or when his deal is refused. The goblin whistles loudly a moment before he teleports away, followed by the heavy footsteps of something enormous and furry approaching from behind the bar.

Onyx Ascendant

> The cat stepping out from behind the bar looks gigantic from your current height. Onyx walks in nonchalantly, yawns, and drops down on the floor to lick herself. Suddenly, a shimmering portal opens up in the middle of the room. You hear Splugoth laughing again as a ball of yarn pops through the portal before it vanishes. Onyx sits up, suddenly attentive, her eyes following the ball as it unravels toward you.



Splugoth the Returned

This scene takes place entirely in the common room of the Dran & Courtier, since none of the interior doors of this version of the inn can be opened. All the characters use their normal speed for movement, but you multiply the dimensions of the common room and any furniture or objects in it by a factor of 10. For example, relative to the characters the length of the bar is 300 feet, while a stool that stands 3 feet high is effectively 30 feet high.

The characters are free to move wherever they can, or to climb objects in the room. Additionally, at the end of each character's turn as they try to avoid Onyx, roll on the Cat Chase Complications table below to see what happens, or use the table as inspiration for your own complications.

Onyx uses the **cat** stat block with these changes:

- Her size (relative to the characters in their diminutive state) is Huge.
- Her speed (relative to the characters) is ten times normal. This gives her a speed of 400 feet and a climbing speed of 200 feet.
- Any damage Onyx would take is reduced to 0 (but see "Dealing with Onyx" below).
- She has advantage on ability checks and saving throws.
- Her claws attack uses the following statistics: +7 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) slashing damage.

Onyx's relative speed likely allows her to move anywhere within the inn on her turn. On her turn, she uses her action to make a Claws attack against a random character if she can.

Dealing with Onyx. Onyx cannot be overcome or killed by combat. Any weapon attack against her that hits AC 12 makes contact but deals no lasting damage. However, if the attack would deal 10 or more damage, Onyx has disadvantage on attack rolls until the end of her next turn. If Onyx would take 10 or more damage from spells or other effects, it yields the same result. Spells that impose conditions function normally against Onyx, but those conditions end automatically at the end of the cat's next turn.

Ending the Chase. Onyx continues her "playful" chase as long as she can see any living characters. Only if all the characters successfully hide from her does she eventually give up. The characters might determine another location to hide at your discretion, but the mouse hole near the fireplace makes an obvious and effective safe spot.

Cat Chase Complications

d20	Complication
1	A tumbling chair or other large obstacle blocks the character's path. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to maneuver over, under, or to the side of the obstacle. On a failed check, the character's speed is halved until the end of their next turn.
2	A small stool is tipped over, or a mug or plate goes flying off a table. The character must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to dodge it. On a failed save, the character is struck a glancing blow for 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage and must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.
3	A previously unseen patch of spiderweb, chewing gum, or mud catches a character as they move. The character must succeed on a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check to push through without becoming stuck. On a failure, the character's speed is halved until the end of their next turn. If the check fails by 5 or more, the character is restrained until they or another character succeeds on a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check to free them.
4	A cloak suddenly slips down from the back of a chair. A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check can grab it, pulling it down onto Onyx. On her next turn, the cat must use her action to free herself before she can move.
5	Spilled ale turns the floor beneath the character into a slippery pool. The character must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.
6	The character attracts the attention of three huge cockroaches, and must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to pass the enormous insects unimpeded. On a failed check, the character takes 3 (1d6) piercing damage from the roaches' bites, and the character's speed is halved until the end of their next turn.
7	A bottle falls off a table and rolls toward the character. The character must succeed on a DC 10 Strength or Dexterity saving throw to dodge or jump over it. On a failure, the character takes 5 (2d4) bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone.
8	A plate of food spills, spreading a field of mashed potatoes, butter and jam, or some other thick, sticky substance in the character's path. The character must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) check to avoid or push through the food. On a failure, the character's speed is halved until the end of their turn.
9	Three wasps feeding on fallen food catch sight of the character and zoom in. The character must succeed on a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to avoid angering them. On a failure, the character is stung and takes 3 (1d6) poison damage.
10–20	No complication.

During the chase, any character within view of the fireplace whose passive Wisdom (Perception) score is 15 or higher spots the mouse hole. A character specifically seeking a ground-level hiding place can attempt a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check from anywhere in the common room to spot the mouse hole, with advantage on the check. At their reduced size, the characters can easily slip through the mouse hole to escape Onyx.

Mouse Den

When the characters reach the mouse hole, they find a small cozy den inside, lined with matted hair and fur. Next to a block of cheese is a bound and unconscious Propha Dran, her clothes stained with dried blood. This is the real Propha (see area 3 of the default inn), who is stable but requires healing to return to consciousness. If awakened, she thanks the characters for their rescue, listens to any explanation of how they got there, then shares the following information:

- Propha was attacked and captured by Splugoth and another goblin (the shapechanged Keymaster). She was tied up and left in this version of the Test Market, presumably to keep her out of the way. Thankfully, Audra Courtier was out of town when the Six's agents attacked.
- She has no idea who the "Propha" in the default version of the inn is. It might be another creature posing as her, but it could also be an actual version of her split off by the Test Market's magic.
- Propha overheard Splugoth talk about the ritual being undertaken in some location called the dimensional caverns. He also bragged that the caverns are guarded by a monster known as an ancient deep crow. Propha can fill the characters in on deep crow lore if they're unfamiliar with those creatures (see appendix B), and makes it clear that even one ancient deep crow is a threat the characters cannot expect to overcome by normal means.
- Propha heard the voices of the "C" Team once while fading in and out of consciousness. Given that the characters haven't seen them, she fears that they might be trapped in one of the other versions of the Test Market.

Advancing to Stage 4

Shortly after finding Propha, reality shimmers around the characters and they are returned to the default inn of stage 1. The characters are once again their normal size, though the only Propha in the room is the doppelganger behind the bar, wearing her blank medallion. The false Propha claims to have no idea what the characters are talking about if they recount their meeting with her.

As before, the characters stay in this default scene until they open another of the inn's interior doors.

Stage 4: Revenge for the "C" Team

> You are standing just inside the front door to the Dran & Courtier. The place is deserted, the tables empty. Everything is in shadow, except where a purple light pulses from the four open bedroom doors above the bar.

This version of the Test Market is empty except for the rooms rented by the "C" Team. When the characters make their way to the second floor, read:

> All four of the bedrooms along the hall show signs of a fierce battle that took place here—and which has seemingly claimed the lives of Walnut Dankgrass, Donaar Blit'zen, Rosie Beestinger, and K'thriss Drow'b. All four members of the "C" Team lie dead on the floor of their individual bedrooms.
>
> The purple light that radiates out from each room pulses out around the edges of the closed interior doors, all of which lead to the shared study beyond.

> My mother must be getting new cats and just calling them Onyx. Otherwise, Onyx would be coming up on fifty years old. And I don't think that's how cats work.
>
> —Omin Dran

The Fallen

Investigation of the members of the "C" Team confirms that they are truly dead. No magic available to the characters can return them to life, and any magic carried by those adventurers is mysteriously inert. If the characters want to loot the bodies, any treasure they might be carrying is left to your determination. There is nothing of value in any of the bedrooms.

Eldritch Horror

When any door into the shared study is opened, the characters see the horror that waits beyond.

> The far wall of the study is filled by a giant gaping maw. Purple eldritch light seeps out of the maw, bathing the room in a sickly glow. Four massive tentacles covered in eyes and spines flail about the room and immediately reach for you.

This creature is an eldritch horror from the Far Realm, using the stat block of an **otyugh**.

The "C" Team Restored

If the characters defeat the eldritch horror, a pulse of magic radiates outward as the maw collapses and vanishes. The members of the "C" Team wake up, freed from the magic that had vanquished them in this version of the Test Market. The characters have a chance to share their story with the NPCs.

The members of the "C" Team know Splugoth well, and can fill the characters in on any information the goblin didn't get around to mentioning in stage 3 (see "Splugoth's Bargain"). They have faced different versions of the Test Market than those seen by the characters, which they talk about if asked (see "Additional Stages" below for inspiration). If they don't presently return to the same version of the Dran & Courtier as the characters (as will prove to be the case), the "C" Team members promise to continue trying to free the inn from the Six's magic.

As thanks for the rescue, K'thriss gifts a pair of *slippers of spider climbing* to the party. The characters then feel themselves being pulled away, back to the default inn of stage 1.

After Stage Four

The "C" Team members do not accompany the characters as they are returned to the stage 1 version of the Dran & Courtier, but end up in other stages of the Test Market until the ritual is ended.

Additional Stages

You are free to add additional stages to the Keymaster's version of the Test Market if the players are having fun with these off-the-wall challenges. Use the following setups, or use them as inspiration for creating your own.

Flashback

The inn changes to resemble one of the other inns or taverns the characters have been to previously during the adventure (the Stonehill Inn or the Sleeping Giant in Phandalin, the Fishbone Tavern in Luskan, and so on). The patrons are people the characters have met before, but one of those patrons tells the characters that someone in the establishment is not who they appear to be. Finding the impersonator reveals a powerful monster of your determination, whose defeat ends the stage.

Inanimate Trauma

No people are found in the Dran & Courtier, but a number of inanimate objects are sitting in chairs where people once were. Written on a chalkboard that would otherwise announce the inn's meal of the day is the phrase: "The names of things must be arranged and spoken." The first letter of each word in the clue is underlined.

This Test Market is a puzzle in which the first letter in the name of each object that was formerly a person must be scrambled to determine a password. You choose the password, then choose the nature of the objects so that their names provide the needed letters. For example, the password "lamp" could be created from a lock, an arrow, a mirror, and a piton. When the password is spoken, the stage ends.

Battle at the Headquarters

The tavern becomes the franchise's headquarters, which is under attack by agents of the Six! For even more chaos, each of the characters temporarily transforms into a franchise staff member using an NPC stat block, so that the players must use those NPCs to repel the attackers. When the battle is over—one way or the other—the stage ends.

Too Many Prophas

The tavern appears normal, but it holds three people who look exactly like Propha Dran and none of them are behind the bar. Each time a Propha touches a character or another patron, the person touched turns into a Propha in body and mind, with the players roleplaying that development as they see fit. Whether as themselves or as Propha, the characters must determine which is the original Propha (still secretly the Keymaster) and get it to touch the other Prophas, which turns them back to normal. Once everyone is their former self, the stage ends.

Need to Feed

Every patron seen previously in the inn has a head resembling a fleshy ball surrounded by tentacles and a gaping maw where a face should be. These otherworldly creatures are tearing the inn apart and attempting to eat everything they can get their hands on—including the characters.

Fighting the patrons is difficult (use the **dire wolf** stat block for each to underline their fierce bite). But if two of them are forced together (by a character shoving one of them, a *thunderwave* spell, and so forth), they immediately attack and wholly consume each other. When only one patron remains, it transforms into Propha (the Keymaster) and the stage ends.

Food Fight

The characters appear behind the bar, with every patron in the inn shouting furiously at them regarding poor service. The patrons begin to hurl food at the characters: +4 to hit, 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage. The patrons are immune to damage from any of the characters' normal attacks and spells. However, each patron is vulnerable to one type of food currently being hurled around the inn. If that type of food hits a patron, they immediately vanish. When all the patrons have been vanquished in this way, the stage ends.

Confronting the Keymaster

Whether as a result of information gathered during stages of the Test Market, magic brought to bear while talking to "Propha," or simply adventurers' instinct, the characters eventually become aware of the Keymaster's identity. If this happens before the characters have triggered all the presented stages of the Test Market, that's fine. You can have the Keymaster flee through an interior door to generate a new stage (see below). Or you can ignore the later stages and let the characters capture the doppelganger (especially if the players are anxious to get to the ritual site as quickly as possible).

When the Keymaster's true nature is discovered, it shifts to its natural form and engages the characters in combat. The Keymaster uses the **doppelganger** stat block with the iconic affiliate of the Six features (see "Iconic Faction Features" in appendix B).

The doppelganger leads with Multiattack if it has surprise, to make the most of its Surprise Attack trait. It otherwise uses its Glimpse of the Beyond feature to blind as many foes as possible. It then attempts to drink a *potion of invisibility* and flee.

If you want it to, the Keymaster opening one of the inn's interior doors triggers the next stage of the Test Market. The doppelganger can vanish in that next stage to leave the characters to their own devices, or it can remain in the next stage, engaging the party in combat and attempting to help the threats of that stage finish them off.

The Keymaster bargains for its life if reduced to 35 hit points or fewer, revealing the following if the characters agree to spare it:

- All the versions of the Dran & Courtier—even the "normal" version—are part of the Test Market. Jim Darkmagic foolishly created the Test Market as a way to test (or, you know, torture) applicants to Acquisitions Incorporated. This established the Dran & Courtier as a crossroads between demiplanes, and its planar instability makes it perfect for opening portals to additional dimensions.
- Splugoth the Returned does not lead the Six, but he oversees this operation. He hates Acquisitions Incorporated, as does everyone in the Six.
- The components of the *Orrery of the Wanderer* are being used to anchor a complex ritual that will open a portal to the Far Realm. When the portal opens completely, an otherworldly army will emerge to destroy Red Larch, sweep across the Sword Coast, and wipe out Acquisitions Incorporated in the process. Of course, all members of the Six have been promised safe harbor and cushy desk jobs under this new regime.
- The Keymaster's job is to oversee the different Test Market dimensions. It has been allowing servants of the Six into the various Test Markets and the ritual site, while trapping and eliminating anyone coming in to cause trouble—especially meddlesome and pesky adventurers.
- The people within the default version of the inn are ordinary mortals trapped by magic, and must remain in the inn until the ritual is shut down. The real Propha likewise remains trapped in stage 3 of the Test Market until the ritual ends.
- The amulet the doppelganger wears controls which Test Market appears when a door is opened. The amulet can also open the door to the basement, which leads to the dimensional caverns (see below), which in turn lead to the ritual site.
- The Keymaster can use the amulet without needing to make an ability check, and will do so at the characters' request if its life is spared. Anyone else who uses an action to activate the amulet and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check can open the basement door.

If the characters control the amulet, they can access any versions of the Test Market, but planar energy continues to course through the Dran & Courtier as a result of Splugoth's ritual. Opening the inn's main doors or contacting NPCs moving through other versions of the Test Market (including the "C" Team) is impossible until the ritual is ended. But once the basement door is opened from within any stage of the Test Market, the characters are ready to enter the dimensional caverns—and to save Faerûn.

Dimensional Caverns

When the basement door is opened, read:

> Instead of a basement stairway, a rough stone tunnel stretches away from the Dran & Courtier, quickly widening to a cavernous space studded with purple crystals. The tunnel echoes with strange voices and far-off sounds, as if originating from distant places ... or perhaps even distant worlds.

The tunnel is unlit. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check made while investigating the tunnel confirms that it is wholly contained within a pocket dimension. Because the characters have been in possession of the orrery housing and some of its components, they feel the presence of whichever components Splugoth now possesses at some great distance straight ahead.

To provide context for the background noise, tell the players that the characters are hearing snippets from the adventures of the "C" Team and Acquisitions Incorporated. You might even use dialogue from an Acquisitions Incorporated live play session as background sound while the characters traverse the tunnel.

The tunnel continues for what feels like forever before the ceiling suddenly begins to rise. The walls frame an impossibly tall canyon that slowly widens, the air becoming hot and heavy with the scent of sulfur. Glowing vents of magma fill a huge cavern with a dull red glow. From somewhere ahead, you hear a deep, echoing caw, sounding like the call of some great bird. It repeats periodically, always far off in the distance.

Set into a large cleft in the canyon wall is an enormous nest of sticks, bones, paper, and other debris. An immense black form resembling a crow shelters in the nest. It has a beak that comes together like mandibles, large enough to grasp a horse. Even more unsettling are the multitude of eyes clustered on its forehead, though those are thankfully all closed in sleep.

The **ancient deep crow** in the nest (see appendix B) is only pretending to sleep. Any character studying the creature and succeeding on a DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Perception) check notices one of its eyes opening momentarily to a glowing red slit. The deep crow's name is Raah, and it (thankfully) has things on its mind other than eating adventurers, as the characters soon discover.

Approaching the Nest

As the characters draw closer, they see a broad expanse of detritus and guano spread out below the nest. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notes that a great amount of that detritus appears to be shredded parchments and bound books—all works destroyed by Raah in various fits of pique.

Either before or after the ancient deep crow awakes, any character can draw close enough to the pile to investigate the destroyed works. These bear such titles as *Twenty Ways to Gain Your Lover*; *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*; *What is Romance?*; *Men are from Abeir, Women are from Toril*; and so forth. Passages on nearly every ruined page are crudely underlined and circled with guano-based pigment.

Waking Raah

At whatever point is convenient as the characters inspect the ruined books or try to skirt past the ancient deep crow's nest, Raah angrily "wakes up."

A sense of doom pervades the cavern around you as the ancient deep crow suddenly rises up. Its great wings unfurl, its multiple eyes blazing red as it lets loose a caw that shakes the cavern walls.

Any character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check intuits that despite its aggressive display, at least some of the ancient deep crow's outrage is feigned, and that it appears to be in a deep state of melancholy.

> I dislike deep crows immensely. But their eggs when cooked up with cheese are delicious.
>
> —Jim Darkmagic

Other characters can note that as Raah shifts around its nest, books and scrolls are knocked out to drift to the ground, all focused on the same subject matter as the destroyed works.

The Hard Way

The characters are free to engage Raah in battle. It has a lot of pent-up rage these days, and is happy to have someone to direct that rage against other than itself. An ancient deep crow is a formidable foe, and Raah does not hold back in combat, opening with its Shadow Caw and carving up characters who dare attack it. Even as the battle unfolds, however, the characters should have the chance to realize that there are other options.

During the fight, Raah shrieks angry epithets in the Deep Crow tongue, such as: "I'll kill you all! Because what else am I good for? No one cares!" If none of the characters understands Deep Crow, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check detects a note of self-recrimination in the creature's savage caw. At the same time, as the ancient deep crow swoops around or a character's *fireball* spell catches the edge of the nest, more parchments might dislodge, revealing underlined passages filled with humanoid dating advice.

At any point at which the characters offer to cease hostilities, or if they are clever enough to negotiate with Raah from the outset, proceed as follows.

Dating Advice

Having a character able to speak Deep Crow with the use of a *tongues* spell or similar magic makes dealing with Raah a lot easier. But if not, don't be afraid to explore the comedic value of negotiating with a deadly lovesick monster by way of pantomime and crude art scratched on cavern walls. (The books in the nest are evidence that Raah can understand at least a bit of Common, which might also give the characters a leg up.)

If the characters ask Raah about the books, the ancient deep crow threatens again to kill them all, but holds back from attacking. Give the characters free rein as they attempt to communicate with an otherworldly creature stricken with all-too-worldly relationship woes, using the following points and ability checks as guidelines.

If the characters are supportive and sincere in their attempts to engage the deep crow, you can decide that successful roleplaying and a reasonable number of successful ability checks let them gain Raah's trust. On a badly failed check or in response to a snide comment, Raah might attack again for a round before calming down.

Understanding Raah. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Raah is feeling emotionally wounded and unsure of itself. The threats it can manifest in battle are deadly, but the ancient deep crow gets no satisfaction from its combat prowess.

A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Nature) check allows a character to recall obscure lore about deep crows and their reproductive practices. A deep crow mates only once in its lifetime, and Raah has so far been spectacularly unsuccessful in its attempts to find a mate.

A successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check encourages Raah to share that its deep crow parent and nest mates taught it only to embrace rage and physical power. It never learned about its emotions or how to listen to others. As a result, the deep crow doesn't know what to say to a potential mate. It just tries to break stuff to impress them.

Giving Raah Advice. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check to quickly assess Raah's reading material determines that the ancient deep crow is highlighting everything, no matter how good or bad the advice might be—and with no thought given to the fact that relationship advice for humanoids has no bearing on its own needs. Raah needs better guidance.

Allow the characters to give Raah any relationship advice that feels apropos. This might involve roleplaying in more ways than one, as a character takes on the part of a prospective deep crow partner and Raah tries to put the advice into practice. If you need mechanics for this scenario, call for DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) checks from each character offering advice to determine how well Raah takes it.

Moving On

When the characters have either defeated or befriended Raah, they can continue beyond the ancient deep crow's cavern toward the ritual site.

> The ancient deep crow's cavernous lair begins to taper down again, revealing another canyon passage ahead. The light of volcanic vents fades behind you as you continue into darkness.

The End of the World

This is it! The showdown with Splugoth! The moment of truth as the characters battle for control of the orrery and try to stop the world's end!

The read-aloud text below assumes that the Six successfully gained the housing of the *Orrery of the Wanderer* in episode 5. If they don't have the housing, any components the Six have obtained spin in place on their own. (Even if the characters thwarted the Six at every turn, Splugoth holds at least the *far gear*.)

Map 6.2 shows the setup of the ritual site and the final battle.

> The inky black space above is now dotted by pulses of purple and green fire. The canyon narrows, then opens again into a cavern, where a broad sandstone rise is lit by sheets of green flame that scour the ceiling. Thin shelves of eroded rock emerge from the center of the rise to create a large central mesa. Ten other goblins stand guard around this promontory, which has twisting steps leading up to where Splugoth stands.
>
> A sandstone pillar rises from the mesa before the goblin. Floating above it is the orrery, its clockwork components spinning rapidly, glowing with power. Behind Splugoth is a rift in reality—a purple wound in the world, beyond which you can see goblins with purple eyes, extra limbs, and other strange mutations. The Far Realm goblins push forward, trying to press through the portal and into your world.
>
> Splugoth laughs. "You are too late! The ritual is under my control, and now you must hear my most villainous speech! Oh, who am I kidding? Goblins, kill these meddlesome fools! And just to sway the odds, how about some ironic assistance for my minions?" With a flourish, Splugoth manipulates one of the orrery's clockwork components. Four purple-black outlines begin to form before the rift—slowly taking the shape of characters you recognize.

Friends from the Far Realm

As the ritual approaches its end, the magic imbued into the orrery components senses the presence of the characters and works to thwart them. Drawing from the franchise's collective subconscious, the ritual manifests the most terrifying figures the characters can think of—their bosses.

At the start of combat, wraithlike Far Realm versions of Omin Dran, Jim Darkmagic, Môrgæn, and Viari appear in front of the planar rift. On initiative count 10 each round, roll on the Far Realm Friends table to determine which of those manifestations vanishes from before the rift, appears suddenly in the thick of combat at a location of your choosing, and lays into the characters.

Far Realm Friends

d4	Far Realm Friend
1	Omin Dran
2	Jim Darkmagic
3	Môrgæn
4	Viari

Whichever Far Realm friend appears in combat lingers on the battlefield until initiative count 0, when it vanishes and reappears before the rift again.

Each Far Realm version of an Acquisitions Incorporated character is shaded purple-black, its eyes glowing yellow-gold. A Far Realm friend has all the information about the characters that Head Office knows, and uses

> All franchisees must note:
> Expenses incurred during extraplanar excursions are NOT eligible for reimbursement.
>
> —Omin Dran

that knowledge to be as effective as possible in combat. It uses the appropriate stat block found in appendix A, but is neutral evil.

The Far Realm friends cannot be attacked while they wait before the rift—only when they manifest in combat. A Far Realm friend that is killed does not reappear in front of the rift. If that character is subsequently rolled on initiative count 10, no Far Realm friend enters the fight that round.

Reaching the Mesa

As the characters fight, their primary goal will be to reach the top of the sandstone mesa, from which the orrery components and the ritual can be controlled. Characters can use the steps to reach the top, but those steps are warded against intruders (see below). Moreover, the Far Realm friends and the goblins fighting for Splugoth attempt to stop the characters from reaching the top at any cost.

Characters can climb to the top of the promontory, but the weathered sandstone crumbles easily. It takes a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check to reach the top, with climbing gear or a rope providing advantage on the check.

Twisting Steps and Rune Traps. The steps leading up the mesa shift underfoot as a result of Far Realm energy flooding through them, making them difficult terrain. Additionally, each flight of steps is trapped at its midpoint with a magical rune that can be detected only with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check.

Once detected, a rune can be disabled with a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check or Dexterity check using thieves' tools. A character aware of the rune can also attempt a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check to jump safely over it. Moving past the rune otherwise deals 5 (1d10) necrotic damage to a creature and teleports it back to the cavern entrance. The runes remain active until disabled.

Planar Rift. The rift tearing reality apart hovers a few feet above the mesa and pulses with eldritch power. A character who reaches the top can see more details behind the Far Realm friends and the army of goblins visible within the rift, including enormous nightmare creatures with far too many eyes, tentacles, and teeth.

Splugoth's Forces

Splugoth spends most of the fight mocking the characters, as long as he and his forces have the upper hand. While he controls the orrery components (see below), he uses a bonus action to mutate his goblins or send an eldritch bolt toward a particularly troublesome character. This leaves him free to attack a character who reaches the mesa top. If he does not currently control the orrery, he attempts to regain control.

Mutating Goblins. During the fight, Splugoth's goblin minions start out as a force of ten **goblins**, with their numbers and combat features augmented by the ritual

MICHELE GIORGI

Keeping the Battle Exciting

This final fight is a complex battle with a lot going on. Whether you want to simplify the encounter or dial up the chaos, you can tweak the elements of the fight as needed to create an exciting challenge.

When the ritual summons new goblins, you can have the minimum or maximum number appear, depending on how the characters are doing in the fight. If the characters are so focused on the fight that they don't make the connection between Splugoth's control of the orrery components and the goblins' appearance, have any character trained in Arcana or Religion intuit that controlling the components can shut down the summoning.

Likewise, if Splugoth is brought back to life by the ritual, you can make it clear to the characters that seizing control of the orrery components can prevent this from happening. At your discretion, you might also limit how many times Splugoth can be returned to life in this manner.

During the fight, feel free to reward player ingenuity. Maybe a character attempts to baffle or seduce a Far Realm friend to remove that manifestation from the fight for the round. If it's roleplayed well enough and you think it might be fun, let it work.

and by Splugoth's control of the orrery components during the fight. See "Ritual Actions" and "Using the Components" below for more information. The goblins spread out, with some hanging back to use their shortbows and others pushing forward into melee.

Ritual Actions

The ritual takes its own turn on initiative count 1. If the characters do not control the orrery components, the rift pulses and 2d4 additional goblins appear on the battlefield wherever they are most effective.

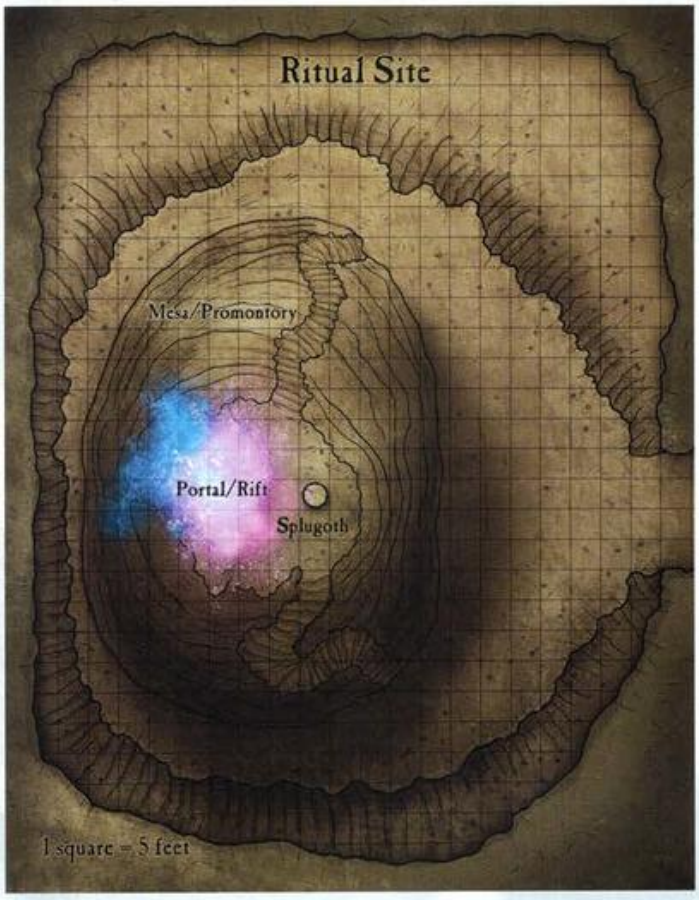
If Splugoth is dead and the characters do not control the orrery components, no goblins are summoned. Instead, the ritual resurrects Splugoth from the dead no matter what condition his body is in, returning him to combat with half his normal hit points.

Controlling the Orrery Components

Depending on which components the Six managed to steal in episode 5, and whether the characters gave up other components to Splugoth in the Test Market, the ritual might be fueled by anything from a single component to all six components set into the orrery housing. While the ritual is in progress, the normal magic of the orrery components and housing does not function in the ritual cavern, even if a component is not being used in the ritual. The ritual works regardless of how many components are involved, but adding or removing pieces has an impact on the ritual's magic (see "Adding Components" and "Removing Components" below).

To seize control of the components fueling the ritual, a creature on the top of the mesa can use a bonus action to attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) or Charisma (Persuasion) check. Splugoth has advantage on this check from his familiarity with the ritual. A successful check wrests control of the components from any creature already controlling them.

A creature that fails in its attempt to control the components triggers a mishap (see "Component Mishaps" below). A creature gaining control is able to use the components as a bonus action (see "Using the Components" below). Once the components are under a creature's control, they remain under that creature's control unless another creature successfully gains control.



Map 6.2: Ritual Site

Adding Components. The characters hopefully have at least one more component (the *wheel of stars* given to them by Lottie), and might still possess additional components and the orrery housing. Any character on the top of the mesa who studies the existing components understands that adding a new component to the mix makes it easier to control the ritual. With an action and a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check or Dexterity check using jeweler's tools or thieves' tools, a character adds a component, granting advantage on any character's next check made to control the ritual.

Removing Components. Any of the components fueling the ritual can be removed as an action with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check or Dexterity check using jeweler's tools or thieves' tools. A failed check results in a mishap (see below). Removing a component weakens the ritual, preventing it from summoning any goblins or raising Splugoth on its next turn. This can be done multiple times, until only one component or the orrery housing remains. The final piece can be removed only once the ritual has ended.

ROBERT LAZZARETTI

Using the Components

A creature controlling the orrery components at the heart of the ritual can channel their magic as a bonus action with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Splugoth has advantage on this check. With a success, the controlling creature can choose one of the following options:

- Stop or resume letting the ritual create new goblins (see "Ritual Actions" above).
- Prevent a Far Realm friend from appearing in combat on the following round.
- Give all goblins a mutation of an extra arm. All goblins, including any goblins summoned in the future, can make one additional attack each round. There is no limit to how many extra arms and attacks the goblins can have.
- Decrease the number of arms on all goblins. If the goblins are reduced to zero arms, they cannot attack.
- Mutate the current and future goblins to cause hard plating to appear on their skin, increasing their AC by 1. This increase can be applied multiple times.
- Reverse the above mutation to decrease the goblins' AC by 1 (to a minimum of 1).
- Mutate the goblins to make them lumpy and awkward. Each goblin has disadvantage on attack rolls until the end of its next turn.
- Fire a bolt of eldritch energy at a target the controlling creature can see: +8 to hit; 16 (3d10) necrotic damage.

Splugoth is not affected by any goblin mutations created by the ritual.

Component Mishaps

On any failed check to control the orrery components or to remove a component, the ritual magic flowing through the components is compromised. Roll on the Orrery Mishap table to determine the particulars.

Orrery Mishap

d6	Mishap
1	Each goblin has advantage or disadvantage (50 percent chance) on attack rolls until the end of its next turn.
2	Each character has advantage or disadvantage (50 percent chance) on attack rolls until the end of their next turn.
3	Each creature must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) radiant damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.
4	The ritual targets a random character who is below their hit point maximum. That character regains 2d4 hit points.
5	A random character grows two extra arms that last until the end of their next turn. While they have these arms, the character has advantage on weapon attack rolls, Strength (Athletics) checks, and Dexterity checks using thieves' tools.
6	If a Far Realm friend appears in the next round, roll twice to have two appear.

Victory Conditions

As long as Splugoth survives, his connection to the ritual prevents the characters from shutting down its magic, even if they are in control of the orrery components fueling the ritual. If Splugoth is dead and one of the characters controls the orrery components, any character on the top of the mesa can use an action to attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check. A successful check ends the ritual and saves the world.

If the battle goes poorly for the characters, they can end it at any point by ... well, dying. Alternatively, they can retreat and allow Faerûn to be taken over by Far Realm horrors, with either event leaving the fate of the world—and more important, the franchise's future—to be determined by you.

Conclusion

With the present threat of the Six and the *Orrery of the Wanderer* ended, the characters attain 7th level! Or maybe they're dead! When the fate of the world hangs in the balance, there's always a chance that the heroes will be defeated. In which case, congratulations! You get to start a new campaign—perhaps one in which another Acquisitions Incorporated franchise plays a part in undoing all the mistakes made by those losers from the last franchise.

NICHOLAS KAY

If the characters were victorious, you can all celebrate a job well done! When the ritual ends, any remaining goblins surrender and beg for mercy (and jobs). Where the rift once opened, a temporary portal now leads back to the Dran & Courtier, which has returned to normal. The freed (and real) Propha Dran thanks the characters for saving the establishment and promises that they will always drink for free while in Red Larch. The members of the "C" Team are likewise indebted to the characters, promising them "just heaps of money" at some time in the future.

Orrery of the Wanderer

The final state of the orrery depends on what happened during the ritual. If a significant number of mishaps occurred while the characters and Splugoth fought for control of the components, the orrery might develop even more random properties, or it might lose some of its more potent powers. Either way, it remains a powerful artifact, as detailed in appendix D.

In keeping with their promise to Lottie, the characters are obliged to break the orrery up again and scatter its components far and wide. But hey, sometimes adventurers are forgetful. In the end, Omin Dran might have to announce that Head Office is taking charge of the orrery's final fate—though the franchise might certainly be entitled to keep a favorite timepiece. (Or two. Really, who can keep track of these things?) And wherever its pieces end up, the *Orrery of the Wanderer* still has a will of its own, and might spawn additional adventures in the future.

The Fate of the Franchise

At an appropriate time, Omin Dran summons the characters to Acquisitions Incorporated Head Office in Waterdeep for a special dinner to thank them for a job well done. The cost of admission is even reduced for the characters and their guests! Whatever reward you think is appropriate can be bestowed upon the characters—including magic or contracts that provide convenient hooks for upcoming adventures.

Franchise Downtime

Even though "The Orrery of the Wanderer" is at an end, the characters should run downtime activities, both as a celebration of their victory (or to lessen the sting of a partial defeat) and to set the course for the campaign to come. The characters might enjoy changing cosmetic elements of their franchise headquarters to reflect their recent victories, spread their reputation as heroes, cement recent alliances, wrap up open plot hooks, or deal with debts or obligations incurred while saving the world.

Friends and Enemies

The characters' heroics might have changed the dynamic between Acquisitions Incorporated and Dran Enterprises, for good or ill. Likewise, a failed ritual deals the Six a severe setback, though Jeff Magic (Splugoth's lich boss) is still out there somewhere. But whether the Six seek immediate revenge or decide to bide their time, things don't stay quiet for long for an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise. New rivals, new allies, and new opportunities are sure to make their presence known.

The Campaign to Come

So what's next? Only you and the players know for sure. You can extend this campaign by allowing the characters to resolve plot hooks left open from previous episodes, or you can build on this adventure with new hooks like the following:

- If the characters were successful in giving relationship advice to Raah the ancient deep crow, it might ask for (or, you know, demand) their assistance to locate and assess potential mates, involving combat or matchmaking as you determine.
- Acquisitions Incorporated has been working to open a franchise in Luskan, and the characters' experience in that city makes them the perfect people to lead the operation. Because they're totally on the best of terms with Dran Enterprises!
- Lottie the lich calls in her favor of not killing the party to hire the characters as troubleshooters. She might need someone to help her out with difficulties in her expansive business operations, or to take care of rivals trying to shoehorn their way into the Greypeaks casino trade. Sure, she's evil. But is she really "evil"? It's a fine line.
- When the characters left the bodies of the dwarf wedding party at the end of episode 5, the dwarves immediately understood that they'd been possessed. Through divination magic or incriminating evidence accidentally left in the caravan on the way out of Horn Enclave, Clans Thunderwind and Dhargun know that the characters were the ones responsible. Clan Dhargun might want to hire the characters as operatives for their business operations or engage in commercial agreements with the franchise on the basis of the characters' extraordinarily clever ruse. Clan Thunderwind might want them all dead.
- If the characters didn't defeat him, evil archmage-for-hire Hoobur Gran'Shoop is still out there somewhere. The crazed gnome might be spoiling for revenge. Or he might have forgotten all about the characters, only to accidentally cross their paths again on completely unrelated business. Seriously, he's a little out of it.
- As word of their triumph over the Six spreads, characters returning to Waterdeep for business will be sought out by Otis Adalgrim, who wants them to meet the Blackstaff, Vajra Safahr. The characters could be asked to join the Gray Hands, and might have an opportunity to work with Force Grey—an elite group of specialist adventurers drawn from the Gray Hands.
- Rumors begin to spread of purple-and-black versions of famous Acquisitions Incorporated members robbing treasure vaults up and down the Sword Coast. That can't be real, right?

Whatever direction you and the players decide to take your Acquisitions Incorporated campaign in, keep one eye on the balance sheet, the other eye on the competition—and have fun.

Appendix A: Acq Inc

This section details some of the notable NPCs who can play a part in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign.

Omin Dran

My duty, first and foremost, is to my shareholders. And I am the only shareholder.

Ominifis Hereward Dran spent his formative years in the small waystop of Red Larch, where his mother, Prophetess, ran a popular inn and restaurant. In the brief periods of respite afforded by working the family business, Omin and his sisters, Auspicia and Portentia, were wont to wander the hills and trails around town, dreaming of adventure. But adventure of the wrong kind came calling for the trio one day, when an underground ruin they had often explored—actually a creature called the Wandering Crypt—took Auspicia from the world.

Omin Dran built the organization called Acquisitions Incorporated to facilitate and expand his quest to find his true sister, at least in part. For despite his unprecedented success in establishing the market for franchised adventuring across the Sword Coast and beyond, Omin's full measure eludes most people. He is known to be a worshiper of Tymora, ruthless in matters of business, feckless in matters of love, and hopeless in games of chance. Omin is also often accused of being one of the Masked Lords of Waterdeep, though this bit of fancy earns little more than a chuckle in response. And even if the rumor were true, Omin would never leverage such a position for greater financial gain and power. Because that would be wrong ...

Omin Dran

Medium humanoid (half-elf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	8 (–1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Wis +7, Cha +4
Skills Deception +4, Insight +7, Intimidation +4, Medicine +7, Perception +7, Persuasion +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Goblin
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Divine Strike. Once on each of his turns when he hits a creature with a weapon attack, Omin can cause the attack to deal an extra 4 (1d8) damage of the same type dealt by the weapon.

Fey Ancestry. Omin has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Spellcasting. Omin is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, sacred flame, spare the dying, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *bless, command, divine favor, shield of faith*
2nd level (3 slots): *enhance ability, hold person, magic weapon, silence, spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *beacon of hope, crusader's mantle, dispel magic, mass healing word, spirit guardians*
4th level (3 slots): *death ward, freedom of movement, locate creature, stoneskin*
5th level (1 slot): *dispel evil and good, flame strike, hold monster, greater restoration, legend lore*

Actions

Multiattack. Omin makes two attacks with his maul.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Reactions

War God's Blessing (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). When a creature within 30 feet of Omin makes an attack roll, but before learning whether it hits or misses, Omin can grant the creature a +10 bonus to that roll.

Jim Darkmagic

Have a magical day!

James Winifred Darkmagic III is the scion of a mysterious, multiplanar wizarding family. Jim's arcane pedigree has long preceded him, incorporating equally healthy amounts of magical training and innate eldritch prowess. However, despite a natural talent that could have allowed him to make a name for himself as a court wizard, or perhaps "that strange old man in the village," Jim's original penchant was not for the magic of scroll or spell, but for the stage.

As an entertainer and purveyor of the "Jim Darkmagic Experience," the legendary mage can often be found in markets and town squares, performing feats of mundane legerdemain. The renown he has earned for these feats is nearly equaled by the reputation that follows him as chief arcanist (and occasional arsonist) for Acquisitions Incorporated. And although his skills as an adventurer and real wizard remain highly sought after, Jim looks forward to a well-earned retirement, at which point he hopes to become a "real wizard"—by which he means a fake wizard—full time.

Jim Darkmagic

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 40 (9d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +4
Skills Acrobatics +5, Animal Handling +4, Arcana +7, History +7, Performance +5
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Special Equipment. Jim carries a *wand of wonder.*

Benign Transportation (Recharges after Jim Casts a Conjuration Spell of 1st Level or Higher). As a bonus action, Jim teleports up to 30 feet to a space he can see. The space must be unoccupied or occupied by a willing Small or Medium creature. If the latter, Jim and the willing creature both teleport, swapping places.

Spellcasting. Jim is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, friends, mage hand, minor illusion, prestidigitation*
1st level (4 slots): *disguise self, Jim's magic missile,* shield, mage armor*
2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility, Jim's glowing coin,* scorching ray*
3rd level (3 slots): *incite greed,* dispel magic, fireball*
4th level (3 slots): *conjure minor elementals, polymorph*
5th level (1 slot): *mislead*
*New spell introduced in chapter 3

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Minor Conjuration. Jim conjures an inanimate object, no larger than 3 feet on a side and no more than 10 pounds, in his hand or on the ground in an unoccupied space he can see within 10 feet of him. The object is visibly magical, radiating dim light out to 5 feet. It disappears if it takes any damage, after 1 hour, or when Jim uses this feature again.

MIKE KRAHULIK

Viari

I know a story about that ...

A product of life on a small-town farm, the rogue known as Viari carries fond memories of those childhood days and his loving family. (Well, except for that thing where his parents insist on thinking of his older brother as the successful one.) But he can be quick to show self-consciousness when talking of where he came from, and he never speaks of the name he bore in that former life.

After quickly rising in the ranks of Acquisitions Incorporated since joining that august team, Viari has come to head what's known as the organization's Stabbing Department. A potent threat in both dueling and earnest debate, he demonstrates an equal flair for planning and forethought, mad combat moves (involving leaping off high places whenever possible), and dark vengeance.

Viari's career as an adventurer was nearly cut short during a battle of which the bards still sing. Unleashing a devastating attack with the aptly named *Apocalypse Dagger*, the rogue destroyed a giant single-handedly—and lost his arm in the process. Although Viari was made bodily whole again in an equally dramatic magical fashion, some of those closest to him have noticed that those miraculous events weigh on him still, perhaps suggesting consequences that only he foresees.

Viari

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic good

Armor Class 18 (*+1 studded leather*; 19 while wielding two melee weapons)
Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +3
Skills Acrobatics +11, Athletics +7, Perception +5, Performance +5, Persuasion +5, Sleight of Hand +11, Stealth +8
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Draconic, thieves' cant
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Evasion. If Viari is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails. He can't use this trait if he's incapacitated.

Second-Story Work. Climbing does not cost Viari extra movement. Additionally, when he makes a running jump, the distance he covers increases by 5 feet.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Viari deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Viari that isn't incapacitated and Viari doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. Viari makes two attacks with his shortsword and two attacks with his rapier.

+1 Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6 + 6) piercing damage.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage.

Reactions

Uncanny Dodge. Viari halves the damage that he takes from an attack that hits him. He must be able to see the attacker.

MIKE KRAHULIK

Môrgæn

If I had wanted to kill, I would have killed.

The ranger Môrgæn is a renowned tracker and hunter, able to pinpoint-target foes at any range, then vanish into the woods with no one the wiser. Her legendary ability with the longbow and the custom arrows she crafts instills fear into the hearts of her many enemies—and more than a few of her coworkers. Famously, she is the only member of Acquisitions Incorporated known to be paid in advance, lest a missed invoice lead to dire repercussions.

A child of the forest, Môrgæn defends the natural world with singular ferocity and an impressive rate of sustained fire. Her core philosophy is that one should shoot first and then ask no questions later. Because what's the point of asking questions when the person you've shot first is already dead? Still, when the situation calls for it, this protector of the woodlands is equally at home on missions of subterfuge and social interaction in the big city, provided her well-known love of ale, wine, and other intoxicants doesn't get the better of her.

Môrgæn

Medium humanoid (elf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)
Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +3, Dex +6
Skills Athletics +3, Insight +4, Nature +3, Perception +4, Stealth +6, Survival +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Giant, Goblin
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Môrgæn has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. Môrgæn's spellcasting ability is Intelligence. She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *mage hand*

Spellcasting. Môrgæn is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following ranger spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *alarm, animal friendship, hunter's mark*
2nd level (3 slots): *pass without trace, spike growth*
3rd level (2 slots): *conjure animals*

Actions

Multiattack. Môrgæn makes three attacks with her scimitars or her longbow.

Scimitars. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Flabbergast

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 40 (9d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +3
Skills Arcana +5, Diplomacy +3, History +5, Perception +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Draconic, Elvish, Gnomish
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Spellcasting. Flabbergast is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation*
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, mage armor, distort value,* sleep*
2nd level (3 slots): *gift of gab,* misty step, suggestion*
3rd level (3 slots): *fast friends,* fly, lightning bolt*
4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility*
5th level (1 slot): *cone of cold*
*New spell introduced in chapter 3

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Flabbergast

Not much is known of the mysterious and aloof majordomo of Acquisitions Incorporated Head Office, the mage known as Flabbergast. It's said that he hails from Neverwinter, and that his wealthy family helped erect and carve the famous Dolphin Bridge in that city. Although he detests physical labor, Flabbergast is a bit of a bridge builder in his own way, always striving to bring people together and flexing his diplomatic muscles. A pacifist bureaucrat, he abhors violence, and rarely puts his magical prowess on display.

One thing that is known (though it's seldom spoken of) is that Flabbergast once worked for Dran Enterprises, and specifically for Portentia Dran. He carries a certain amount of guilt around being complicit in certain Dran Enterprises' dealings, and helped Acquisitions Incorporated on the side even before taking up an official role with the company. Though Head Office certainly trusts him, others might wonder where his true loyalties lie.

Flabbergast's familiar, Mister Snibbly, uses the **cat** stat block.

The "C" Team

The Acquisitions Incorporated "C" Team is an up-and-coming adventuring franchise whose members have proven themselves able to handle the most dire threats—and equally able to fully capitalize on the resultant marketing opportunities. Tales of the group's adventures are well known across the North and the Sword Coast. But less well known to many is that the "C" team did not come together by mere chance.

Walnut Dankgrass, Rosie Beestinger, Donaar Blit'zen, and K'thriss Drow'b were all hand-selected for membership in Acquisitions Incorporated by founder Omin Dran, based on an experience he'd had as a young man. Upon entering a creature called the Wandering Crypt, Omin saw a vision of the heroes who would deliver his sister from that same creature years hence—and later created the "C" Team as a manifestation of his lifelong goal of seeing Auspicia Dran returned to the world.

The "C" team is headquartered in the small town of Red Larch, residing at the Dran & Courtier inn. The fact that the proprietor of this inn is one Prophetess "Propha" Dran, mother of Omin Dran, is entirely coincidental but a totally excellent strategic and cost-saving move.

Donaar Blit'zen

Everybody coooooool out!

The hulking dragonborn decisionist of the "C" Team, Donaar Blit'zen is an icon of brash confidence and warrior chill. He is known for his furious skill in battle, and for his propensity to fall asleep as soon as a fight is done (as well as countless other inopportune times). More immediately notable is the unique physical trait that all members of his clan bear—a stylish tail that is rare and often considered a deformity among dragonborn.

As with his tail, an odd quirk of heritage makes Donaar's acid breath more of a signature vomiting, giving rise to a driving paranoia that this regurgitation might damage his teeth. As testaments to his obsession

with dental hygiene, Donaar named his greatsword Toothbrush and calls his whip Floss. He carries an actual toothbrush (named Percival) and actual floss at all times.

Those who know Donaar quickly come to recognize that the braggadocio that defines him involves a certain amount of artifice. When the young dragonborn left his clan and family to adventure in foreign climes, he realized that doing so provided the perfect opportunity to reinvent himself for folk who had no idea what he was once like. As such, Donaar has learned that no amount of bravado and compensation is too much—provided he leaves no openings for strangers to call him on it. By the same token, strangers quickly come to realize that reinforcing Donaar's self-congratulating sense of draconic entitlement makes it remarkably easy to win his favor.

Despite his easily massaged vanity, the dragonborn sometimes shows the occasional streak of selflessness. Most notably, Donaar serves in his off-hours as part-time godfather to a young dragonborn named Chronaar, who had inadvertently imprinted on Donaar as a parental figure while he watched over her while she was in her egg.

Donaar Blit'zen

Medium humanoid (dragonborn), chaotic good

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	8 (–1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +2, Cha +5
Skills History +2, Insight +2, Intimidation +5, Persuasion +5
Damage Resistances acid
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Draconic, Orc
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Champion Challenge (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). As a bonus action, Donaar causes each creature of his choice that he can see within 30 feet of him to make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature can't willingly move more than 30 feet away from Donaar. This effect ends on the creature if Donaar is incapacitated or dies, or if the creature is moved more than 30 feet away from him.

Spellcasting. Donaar is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *command, compelled duel, cure wounds, wrathful smite*
2nd level (2 slots): *aid, branding smite, lesser restoration, warding bond, zone of truth*

Actions

Multiattack. Donaar makes two attacks with his greatsword or his whip.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage. Whenever Donaar rolls a 1 or 2 on a damage die, he can reroll the die and must use the new roll.

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

Acid Vomit. Donaar regurgitates acid in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

K'thriss Drow'b

All things are divided into meat and mouths—but even a mouth is just meat.

The drow warlock K'thriss Drow'b cuts a dashing figure as the worldly representative of the Ur—a ravenous, inscrutable, and largely indifferent elder entity from beyond reality. Tapped into this dark power, the "C" Team's hoardsperson sees all existence as a puzzle to unlock, and he is obsessed by the essential lack of meaning and purpose in the structures of so-called "reality." Still, all things considered, he is most often polite and affable. Because after a long adventuring career, he understands that he can't afford to make more enemies.

Given his blue skin tone, rumors suggest that K'thriss is of mixed heritage, but no one knows for sure. As a young and doubting adherent of Lolth, he stumbled upon fragments of a relic known as the Black Altar, exposing him to their infinite truths and shocking the drow's hair jet-black. His matching "beard" is actually a slow-growing colony of inert spores that K'thriss believes makes him look distinguished. Possessed of alarming and asymmetric crystalline eyes, he often wears a blindfold to spare others his visage, seeing through the eyes of his familiar while he does.

Tentacles play a big part in K'thriss's spellcasting, whether wrenching him through the sky when he uses magic to fly, or manifesting in dark, suckered form when he casts spells such as *thorn whip*. And when enemies hear K'thriss whisper the deep truths of the Ur—typically something about how on a geologic time scale, everyone's desires are meaningless—they remember it.

K'thriss's familiar, Ligotti, is a semisapient remnant of a tentacle attack, spawned by the warlock's intercessor patron god. Though entirely alien to the material plane (and often appearing in the form of a staff), Ligotti uses the stat block of a **poisonous snake** with these changes:

- It has an Intelligence score of 12 (+2).
- It has telepathy out to a range of 30 feet.

K'thriss Drow'b

Medium humanoid (elf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)
Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (−1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +0, Dex +3, Con +2, Int +3, Wis +3, Cha +7
Skills Arcana +4, Insight +2, Investigation +4, Perception +2, Religion +4
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Celestial, Common, Elvish, Undercommon; can read all writing
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Special Equipment. K'thriss wears a *robe of stars* (accounted for in his statistics). The robe allows him to cast the following spells:

6/day: *magic missile* (7 missiles)

Awakened Mind. K'thriss can telepathically speak to any creature he can see within 30 feet of him, provided the creature can understand at least one language.

Fey Ancestry. K'thriss has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, K'thriss has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Innate Spellcasting. K'thriss's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights, disguise self*
1/day each: *darkness, faerie fire*

Spellcasting. K'thriss is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He regains his expended spell slots when he finishes a short or long rest, and knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, eldritch blast, mending, prestidigitation, thorn whip, vicious mockery*
1st–3rd level (2 3rd-level slots): *dissonant whispers, fly, hex, misty step, sending, shatter*

Actions

Multiattack. K'thriss makes two attacks with his sickle.

Sickle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Rosie Beestinger

Small humanoid (halfling), chaotic good

Armor Class 15 (Unarmored Defense)
Hit Points 45 (10d6 + 10)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +1, Dex +5
Skills Acrobatics +5, History +3, Intimidation +4, Stealth +5
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Draconic, Elvish, Halfling
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Brave. Rosie has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Halfling Nimbleness. Rosie can move through the space of any creature that is of a size larger than hers.

Evasion. If Rosie is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, she instead takes no damage if she succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if she fails. She can't use this trait if she's incapacitated.

Shadow Step. When Rosie is in dim light or darkness, she can use a bonus action to teleport 60 feet to an unoccupied space she can see that is also in dim light or darkness. She then has advantage on the first melee attack she makes before the end of the turn.

Innate Spellcasting. Rosie's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *minor illusion, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*
1/day each: *command, darkness, darkvision, pass without trace, silence*

Actions

Multiattack. Rosie makes three attacks, then makes two unarmed strike attacks.

Staff of the Master (+1 Quarterstaff). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage, or 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

Unarmed Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. Rosie's unarmed strikes are magical.

Reactions

Deflect Missiles. In response to being hit by a ranged weapon attack, Rosie deflects the missile. The damage she takes from the attack is reduced by 1d10 + 9. If the damage is reduced to 0, she catches the missile if it's small enough to hold in one hand and she has a hand free.

Rosie Beestinger

Well, I have this jar of eyeballs ...

Weighing in at just under 30 pounds and with a grandmotherly demeanor befitting her advanced age, Rosie Beestinger is easily mistaken for someone on the wrong side of the "aggressor/victim" relationship. But this is a mix-up that few people make more than once. Patient and studious, Rosie has schooled more than one malcontent with what the halfling refers to as "the sauce"—a whirlwind of kicks and punches to one or the other haunches that can inspire even the toughest half-orc to sprint toward anyplace Rosie isn't. As an increasing number of folk hear the tales of her prowess, the "C" Team cartographer's fame among her fellow halflings has become nothing short of legendary. Still, this adoration might be augmented by the sheer number of halflings related to Rosie. She has a daunting number of natural and adopted children, many of whom have followed their mother along the adventuring career track.

Rosie's goals have always been more complex than merely seeking after adventure. She has long sought for ultimate meaning in the stars, and to seek justification for her belief that her bonds to her expansive family are reflected in the endless movements and intricate patterns of the sky. However, the Beestinger clan has a less metaphysical reputation in the eyes of many people, as constantly swirling rumors attempt to connect the family to various and nefarious halfling criminal enterprises. Naturally, Rosie knows nothing about any of that. Sure, her nickname is "Grandmother Night," but that probably doesn't mean anything.

Walnut Dankgrass

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (leather armor)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +2, Wis +6
Skills Athletics +1, Insight +6, Perception +6, Stealth +5, Survival +6
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Druidic, Elvish, Sylvan
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Walnut has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Mask of the Wild. Walnut can attempt to hide even when she is only lightly obscured by foliage, heavy rain, falling snow, mist, and other natural phenomena.

Wild Shape (Recharges after a Short or Long rest). As a bonus action, Walnut can assume the shape of a dire wolf. She can stay in this form for 3 hours or until she reverts to her normal form as a bonus action. She automatically reverts if she falls unconscious, drops to 0 hit points, or dies.

While transformed, Walnut's game statistics are replaced by the statistics of the dire wolf, except she retains her alignment, personality, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores. Her attacks in beast form are magical. While in beast form, Walnut can use a bonus action to expend one spell slot and regain 1d8 hit points per level of the spell slot expended.

Spellcasting. Walnut is a 7th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft, produce flame, thorn whip*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, entangle, thunderwave*
2nd level (3 slots): *flame blade, moonbeam, pass without trace*
3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning, dispel magic, plant growth*
4th level (1 slot): *blight, freedom of movement*

Actions

Multiattack. Walnut makes two attacks with Foremother or her longbow.

Foremother (+1 Scimitar). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Walnut Dankgrass

The war ever rages.

Growing up in an all-female clan of druids, healers, and rangers, Walnut Dankgrass was drawn to the role of protector from her earliest years. Dedicated to Mielikki, the matriarchal clan known as the Enclave Panax Anima defended the unspoiled wild by word and blade (with the latter option more prevalent by far). But when tragedy struck the enclave, Walnut's clan was destroyed to the last—leaving her with nothing but the all-consuming desire to seek out and destroy those responsible.

As a guardian of the wild, Walnut has long held an antipathy toward civilization and anything urban. However, understanding that civilization was the source of the evil that destroyed her people, she makes the city her home now. She embraces her role as the "C" Team's documancer, knowing that the city's power—and its weaknesses—can be fully gleaned only from within.

Walnut distrusts most folk she meets, except for those whose bearing reflects the matriarchal structure she was once part of. No matter what shape her struggles take, she knows instinctively that her beliefs are right and true—and that she will follow those beliefs to the bitter end.

The "B" Team

Though its exploits are not as well known as those of fellow franchisees the "C" Team, the Acquisitions Incorporated "B" Team has a solid reputation for getting things done. Often traveling together in the guise of a musical group, the team is best known for its "whatever, wherever, whenever" mission statement and a predilection for extreme violence. (If you meet any of its members, don't talk about the vampires. Just don't.)

Brahma Lutier

Formally a former member of the "B" Team, Brahma Lutier is a gifted cartographer, spy, and troubadour. Tutored in at least the latter of those vocations by Audra Courtier (wife of Propha Dran and co-owner of the Dran & Courtier inn of Red Larch), Brahma's specialty is a song of domination that is legendarily difficult to resist.

Brahma Lutier

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Skills Perception +3, Performance +5, Persuasion +5
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Brahma has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Spellcasting. Brahma is a 4th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, message, vicious mockery*
1st level (4 slots): *charm person, heroism, illusory script, sleep, unseen servant*
2nd level (3 slots): *cloud of daggers, invisibility*

Taunt (2/Day). Brahma can use a bonus action to target one creature she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can hear Brahma, it must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws until the start of Brahma's next turn.

Actions

War Lute. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Song of Domination (3/day). Brahma targets one creature that can see or hear her, which must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by her for 1 minute. The target can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. It has disadvantage on these saves if being charmed by Brahma is something the target openly or secretly desires. For 1 hour after the charm effect ends, the target has disadvantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma checks made as part of a contest with Brahma.

Her retirement is said to be connected to a falling out with husband Oak Truestrike, and Brahma has been operating as a solo agent for some time now. Known for a personality that is murderous and cheery in equal part, she utilizes an instrument of dragonborn design in combat. Known as a war lute, this unique item comes replete with hidden storage and powerful weaponry.

Oak Truestrike

Oak Truestrike is the "B" Team's decisionist—and, depending on who you talk to, a reincarnated demigod. (It's a long story.) Those who know him acknowledge his confidence, his arrogance, and his odd ability to engage with others by somehow saying exactly what each listener wants to hear. Whether this is some subtle magical ability or simply grifter's charm, he makes good use of it either way.

Oak becomes a radically different person with each of his reincarnations, flipping between neutral good and neutral evil. His memories of past lives have been fractured by his many deaths, but he spends each new life accounting for the previous life in a karmic-ledger kind of way. His current incarnation embraces the good side. Mostly. Except for that occasional toxic bitterness. Oh, and the misanthropy. Actually, if you end up hating this guy, it's probably not your fault.

Oak Truestrike

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral good/neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Nature +3, Perception +3, Performance +2, Stealth +5, Survival +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Oak has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Keen Hearing and Sight. Oak has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or sight.

Actions

Multiattack. Oak makes three attacks with his hooked daggers or his hand crossbow.

Hooked Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Reactions

Return the Favor (3/day). When Oak takes damage from a melee weapon attack, he can make a hooked dagger attack.

Phoenix Anvil, Oak Truestrike, Brahma Lutier, and Pendragon Beestinger

Pendragon Beestinger

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +5, Investigation +5, Performance +2
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Draconic, Elvish, Halfling
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Echo Spell (1/day). Pendragon can cast the spell he cast on his last turn, whose casting time becomes 1 bonus action. This bonus casting uses a spell slot as normal.

Spellcasting. Pendragon is a 4th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *acid splash, light, mage hand, poison spray, shocking grasp*
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, mage armor, magic missile, sleep*
2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, cloud of daggers, scorching ray*

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Phoenix Anvil

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (chain mail and shield)
Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)

Skills Athletics +4, Performance +3 Persuasion +3, Religion +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Divine Display (1/day). As a bonus action, Phoenix causes his shield to flare with divine light. Each creature of his choice within 30 feet of him must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself with a success.

Spellcasting. Phoenix is a 4th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, mending, sacred flame*
1st level (4 slots): *bane, cure wounds, guiding bolt*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, spiritual weapon*

Actions

Multiattack. Phoenix makes two melee attacks.

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be pushed 5 feet.

CHRIS WALTON, HERO NORMAL

Pendragon Beestinger

Able arcanist Pendragon Beestinger took over as "B" Team cartographer after Brahma Lutier left the group. In fact, his first assignment was to assist in the team's attempts to apprehend the wandering bard. An adopted child of the "C" Team's Rosie Beestinger, Pendragon is his mother's foil in almost every way—including his goal of wanting to mainstream some of the family's rumored criminal interests. Pendragon has, in fact, attempted to kill his mother—and been killed himself in the process. Despite his having been resurrected at Rosie's request, things remain cool between the two.

Pendragon was kicked out of wizarding school as a result of the dark rumors following the Beestinger clan. Now a self-taught mage, he specializes in making use of the dangerous spells and weird trinkets he often comes across in his role as a kind of arcane archaeologist. Seeking out the family feeling that an adventuring group provides keeps him in the "B" Team, even if that unfortunately comes with Oak Truestrike as a kind of father figure.

Phoenix Anvil

The "B" Team hoardsperson, Phoenix Anvil is a servant of Waukeen and a soft-spoken sort. Really soft. Like, he talks so infrequently that even he might not recognize his own voice. Phoenix comes from the streets, where he grew up a fighter until a job sweeping the steps of a small temple of Waukeen showed him a new path. His hunger for coin as an adventurer is thus guided by his knowledge of what it is to do without.

More of an object individual than a people person, Phoenix is obsessively dedicated to the franchise's assets and accounts. Thankfully, he includes his fellow members among those assets, making him fiercely loyal. However, Oak Truestrike is the only team member he's ever really warmed to, which doesn't do either of them any good.

House Dran

As the renowned head of Acquisitions Incorporated and totally not a Masked Lord of Waterdeep, Omin Dran sometimes seems the epitome of the self-made humanoid. But those who know the story of Omin's rise to power know the importance of his family to that story—and the complicated relationships that continue to bind Acquisitions Incorporated to the women of House Dran.

Auspicia Dran

The youngest sister of Omin Dran, the half-elf Auspicia Dran had her life torn apart as a child when she was seized by a mysterious creature called the Wandering Crypt. Having spent long years in a kind of dark dream within the crypt, she was saved in the end by her brother Omin's tireless efforts and the valor of his handpicked "C" Team. Now returned safely to the world—and with the false Auspicia of the crypt's creation slain—she focuses on trying to discover her own identity and to work through the ongoing complications arising from her ordeal.

When Auspicia emerged from the Wandering Crypt, she carried within her a growing level of psionic power. She can't help but read others' minds, but finds that wearing a diamond earring helps tamp that unwitting ability down. This magic has also left her connected to the crypt in a way she doesn't understand, even as it grants her occasional memories of others still trapped there and an awareness of faraway places. In combat, she manifests an instinctive knowledge of events before they happen, often making use of this ability to bring a fight to a standstill that encourages parley. But she has only just begun to explore her full precognitive potential.

Portentia Dran

Now the owner and driving force behind Dran Enterprises—perhaps Acquisitions Incorporated's most notable rival in the adventuring-for-profit-and-power biz—Portentia Dran is more than she appears to be. Quite literally. The person known as Portentia is actually a changeling, who took the place of the real Portentia before her fifth year.

Portentia, Prophetess, and Auspicia Dran

The changeling Portentia can affect a range of disguises, and has spent long years engaged in a mission of manipulating the members of the Dran family. Years ago, it was Portentia who tricked her sister Auspicia into exploring the depths of the Wandering Crypt. And she would have been successful in arranging for Omin to be claimed by that creature as well if he hadn't fled immediately in search of a weapon to aid his captured sister.

Whether in combat or social encounters, Portentia shifts frequently between different forms and mindsets, only some of which are fully humanoid. She fights to maim, with a cruel combat style that emphasizes surprise and painful instruction. She is willing to affect any appearance or attitude to achieve her goals. But what those goals are—for herself and Dran Enterprises alike—remain a secret known only to her.

Prophetess Dran

The elf matriarch of the Dran clan, Prophetess is a retired paladin of Tymora who now runs the inn known as the Dran & Courtier. Formerly owned by her parents (and once called the Omindran), the inn has been a central feature of the village of Red Larch since before there was a Red Larch.

Portentia Dran

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger), lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +6, Insight +3, Perception +3
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Portentia deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Portentia that isn't incapacitated and Portentia doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. Portentia makes three melee attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Change Shape. Portentia magically polymorphs into a humanoid or beast that has a challenge rating equal to or less than her own, or back into her true form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (her choice). In a new form, Portentia retains her game statistics and ability to speak, but her AC, movement modes, Strength, Dexterity, and special senses are replaced by those of the new form, and she gains any statistics and capabilities (except class features, legendary actions, and lair actions) that the new form has but that she lacks.

Prophetess spent long years haunted by the fate of her daughter, Auspicia. She never fully believed Omin's stories about the strange creature that had seized his sister, then created a false Auspicia in her stead. Having long attempted to simply make her peace with the loss, she was overwhelmed by the real Auspicia's dramatic and unexpected return to the world. Through all that time and currently, Prophetess has maintained a challenging relationship with her faith.

Though retired from active service to her deity, Prophetess can call on her spells and abilities in times of need, and remains in constant practice with Confessor, her maul. At her core, she believes that the gods help those who help themselves, and that people have a responsibility to their community. A practical sort who prefers to do things on her own, she doesn't like to fuss with prayer if she doesn't need to, as if bothering Tymora with trifles might seem rude.

Prophetess uses the **priest** stat block with the following changes:

- She is lawful good.
- She has Strength 14.
- She wears breastplate (AC 14).
- She has the following attack: ***Maul.*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.
- She has these racial traits: Prophetess has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep. She has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. She speaks Common and Elvish.

Auspicia Dran

Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral good

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Innate Spellcasting (Psionics). Auspicia's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence. She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *detect thoughts*
1/day: *augury*

Actions

Multiattack. Auspicia makes two attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Appendix B: Monsters

This appendix details a few creatures that have roles to play in this adventure, and which can play an ongoing part in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign.

Chaos Quadrapod

A cluster of four suckered tentacles with a pulsing mass of ethereal light as its central body, the chaos quadrapod is a creature of the Far Realm, and it channels the anarchic power of that plane as it destroys all in its path. The quadrapod ambulates by flinging its mucus-covered tentacles out and dragging itself along, creating a horrid slurping sound as it advances relentlessly toward its prey.

Chaos Quadrapod

Large aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural)
Hit Points 52 (7d10 + 14)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	4 (–3)

Skills Acrobatics +5, Perception +4
Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 14
Languages —
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Magic Resistance. The chaos quadrapod has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. The chaos quadrapod makes up to two tentacle attacks.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. The chaos quadrapod can grapple no more than two targets at a time.

Chaos Cloud (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The chaos quadrapod shoots forth a knot of roiling ethereal light that explodes at a point it can see within 60 feet of it. Each creature in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

Clockwork Dragon

These intricately crafted constructs are typically made to reflect the forms of the metallic dragons. Plated in brass, bronze, copper, or faux gold and silver, they are often taken for fine draconic statues at first glance. A clockwork dragon makes a formidable guardian or defender, with its advanced intellect allowing it to be programmed with a wide range of orders, as well as being capable of wholly independent reactions to potential threats.

Though most clockwork dragons have a breath weapon that deals fire damage, some might be constructed to deal acid, cold, or lightning damage, depending on their makers' whims.

Clockwork Dragon

Medium construct, neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)

Skills Acrobatics +2, Perception +4
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

False Appearance. While the clockwork dragon remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a metal statue.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The clockwork dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Deep Crow

The only warning you'll get is that fearsome, far-off caw, echoing from the darkness like a death knell. For by the time those glowing red eyes fix on you, it's far too late to run ...

Some adventurers and sages whisper that deep crows were first spawned as the familiars of evil arcane casters, abandoned in the subterranean depths and left to grow to enormous size. Others claim these creatures were once normal crows transmuted by vile essence and viler powers. But one thing all agree on is that ending up a meal for one of these monstrosities is a too-real threat for those who stumble into their deadly lairs.

Though the deep crow most immediately resembles a massive version of its namesake bird, this creature is a unique form of avian insect. Seen up close, it can easily be discerned from any other giant bird by its insectoid maw, its four-clawed feet, and the cluster of red eyes that are the most unsettling part of its appearance.

Deep Crow

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 133 (14d10 + 56)
Speed 20 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	8 (–1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +6
Skills Perception +6, Stealth +11
Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Deep Crow
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Magic Resistance. The deep crow has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the deep crow can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the deep crow has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The deep crow makes three attacks: one with its mandibles and two with its claws.

Mandibles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 17). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the deep crow can't use its mandibles on another target.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

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Terror from Above. The deep crow's most fearsome attack is the bite of its mandibles, which can seize and hold almost any creature. Their preferred attack is a snatch-and-grab that sees a deep crow flying off with a living victim before its companions have any chance of counterattack. Provided the doomed prey doesn't struggle, the deep crow takes it back to its lair to be devoured at leisure. Creatures that do struggle might be repeatedly dropped from a height to soften them up a bit.

Family Ties. Deep crows live alone for an unknown length of years, emerging from the lair only to hunt, to look for potential threats, and to mate. Mating is a once-in-a-lifetime urge that sees each deep crow involved in the pairing produce a cluster of four to eight eggs. Incubation lasts a year, followed by a year during which the fledgling deep crows stay close by their parent's side. The young then set out to establish lairs of their own.

Unknown and Inscrutable. The mindset of these intelligent yet alien creatures is a mystery, but some who have encountered them relate that they are quick to hold a grudge. For years. Of even greater importance, they can teach their chicks to harbor the same resentments, instilling a cross-generational hatred of chosen foes that can last for centuries.

Ancient Deep Crow

So little is known of the deep crows that even less is known of their monstrous leviathan cousins, the ancient deep crows. Whether these gargantuan specimens are elder deep crows grown to great size or some higher form that holds lesser deep crows in thrall remains to be determined. Ideally by someone else. Seriously, stay away from these things.

A Deep Crow's Lair

Deep crows and ancient deep crows roost in places both deep and warm, favoring sites with access to exposed lava. The spires of volcanic rock the creatures prize as roosts are common in such places, whose ambient warmth provides constant temperature regulation for the creature's eggs.

Regional Effects

The region containing an ancient deep crow's lair is transformed by the creature's presence, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Supernatural shadow turns all bright light to dim light in underground regions within 6 miles of the lair.
- Intermittent, echoing caws can be heard coming from all directions within 6 miles of the lair.
- Subterranean beasts within 1 mile of the ancient deep crow's lair serve as the creature's eyes and ears, alerting it to the presence of intruders and making it all but impossible to surprise the ancient deep crow.

If the ancient deep crow dies, these effects fade immediately.

Ancient Deep Crow

Huge monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 187 (15d12 + 90)
Speed 20 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	16 (+3)	23 (+6)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +11, Wis +7
Skills Perception +7, Stealth +13
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Deep Crow
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Magic Resistance. The ancient deep crow has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the ancient deep crow can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. The ancient deep crow makes three attacks: one with its mandibles and two with its claws.

Mandibles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 19). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the ancient deep crow can't use its mandibles on another target.

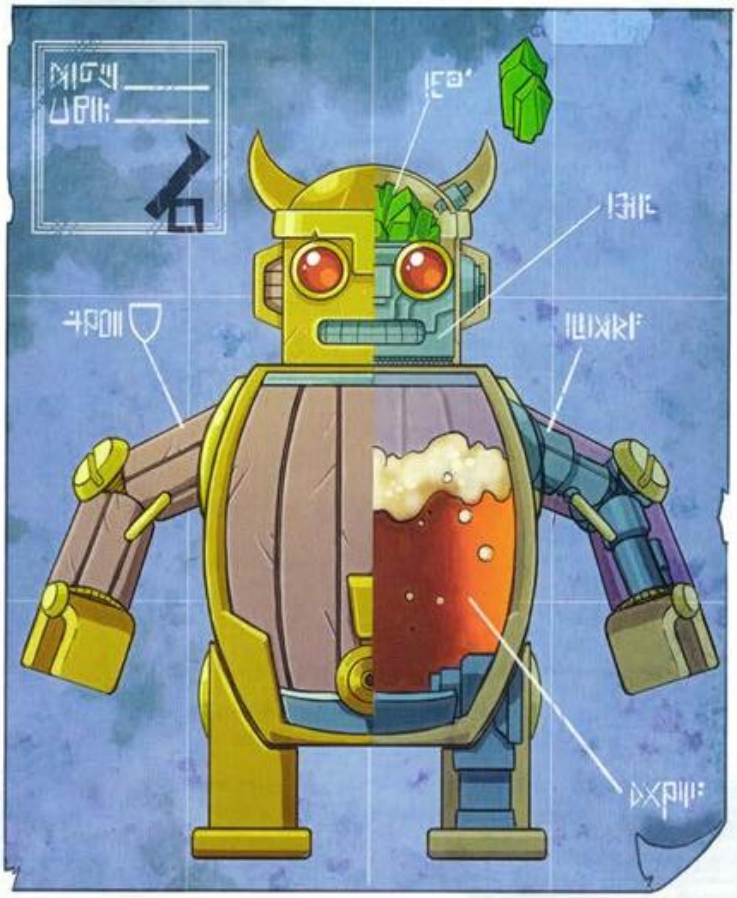
Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Shadow Caw. The ancient deep crow releases an ear-splitting caw. Each creature within 60 feet of the crow and able to hear it must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage.

Legendary Actions

The ancient deep crow can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The ancient deep crow regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The deep crow makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.
Shadow Caw (Costs 2 Actions). The ancient deep crow uses Shadow Caw.
Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The ancient deep crow beats its wings. Each creature within 10 feet of the deep crow must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The ancient deep crow can then fly up to half its flying speed.



Keg Robot

This beer is delicious. But did the spigot really have to be placed in that spot?

A keg robot is a stout wood-and-metal construct, vaguely reminiscent of a dwarf wearing a horned helm and possessing a barrel for a body. These constructs are another achievement of the Heuristic Arcane Research and Development (HARD) department of Acquisitions Incorporated. These devices have a number of practical purposes, including the ability to be filled with a variety of substances of use to an adventuring party. Specific models are nominally named for their primary function, including "ambulatory fermenter," "mobile alchemical dispensary," and so forth. But their prominent use as portable beer dispensers has placed the name "keg robot" firmly into public consciousness.

A keg robot can hold up to three different kinds of liquid in its body cavity, from water and other potables to alchemical substances and lamp oil. Its individual storage compartments can leak, providing drinkable liquids with a unique but mostly safe flavor. These constructs have a rudimentary intellect that allows them to operate independently and discern friend from foe—and which sometimes causes them to operate with a crass sense of humor that has never been fully explained.

Keg Robot

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	6 (–2)	8 (–1)	5 (–3)

Skills Perception +1
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages understands Common but can't speak
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Customizable Storage. A keg robot can hold up to three types of liquid payload totaling 12 gallons within its hollow, barrel-shaped body. A full keg robot can make one liquid attack per gallon before the liquid must be refilled. Filling a keg robot takes 2 rounds per gallon. Differing payloads can alter the keg robot's attacks from those presented here.

Actions

Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Acid Squirt. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 20/40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) acid damage.

Beer Shower. The keg robot spews an unnaturally potent beer in a 15-foot cone or in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned. While poisoned in this way, a creature has its speed halved by exposure to the potent brew. An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Additionally, the beer shower extinguishes any fires or open flames in its area.

Hot Oil Spray (Recharge 5–6). The keg robot sprays hot oil in a 15-foot cone or in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in the area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 7 (1d8 + 3) fire damage and falls prone. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and doesn't fall prone.

Any creature affected by the hot oil spray that takes fire damage before the oil dries (after 1 minute) takes an additional 3 (1d6) fire damage, and the oil burns away. If the oil that remains in the area of the spray is lit, it burns for 1d4 rounds and deals 3 (1d6) fire damage to any creature that enters the area for the first time on a turn or ends its turn there.

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Splugoth the Returned

I'm going to give you a piece of advice. Don't trust Acquisitions Incorporated. And never, ever, ever trust Omin Dran. Wait, that's two pieces of advice. You owe me.

Sometimes a goblin can't catch a break. First, you fall in with a cult that works for the release of a death god. Then you get taken prisoner by a group of sociopathic adventurers who end up letting you die after you save their sorry lives. One minute, you're a dead goblin named Splug. And then you're alive again, and it seems like a really good idea to play up the drama of resurrection with a cool new name—and a master plan for cold, cold revenge against those who betrayed you.

Every once in a while, the (accidentally) capricious and (totally unintentionally) self-centered nature of an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise might incur some collateral damage among followers, hirelings, and staff. When that happens, the collateral damage sometimes inspires some collateral damage of its own. No one is entirely sure how many times Splugoth the Returned has actually returned from the dead. But as the point goblin for the group known as the Six (see "Factions and Rivals" in chapter 3), he's made vengeance against Acq Inc and Omin Dran his life's work. And then the work of his next life. And the one after that.

Splugoth the Returned

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 27 (6d6 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +4, Wis +2
Skills Stealth +6
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Draconic, Elvish, Goblin
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Defensive Advantage. As long as two or more of Splugoth's allies are within 5 feet of him and are not incapacitated, attack rolls against him are made with disadvantage.

Nimble Escape. Splugoth can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of his turns.

Touch of Madness. Splugoth has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Actions

Multiattack. Splugoth makes two attacks with his dagger.

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Word From Beyond (1/day). Splugoth remembers and repeats aloud a few words from a place he entered while walking back from the next world to this one. Each creature of his choice within 30 feet of him that can hear him must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

Reactions

Absorb Attack. When a creature Splugoth can see hits him with a melee weapon attack, the weapon snags on a pocket of residual resurrectional energy and is caught fast. The attack is negated and the weapon cannot be used until the creature succeeds on a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check as an action to pull it out of Splugoth. Natural weapons can have their attacks negated by this feature, but can then be retracted automatically at the end of the attacking creature's turn.

Iconic Faction Features

An Acquisitions Incorporated campaign frequently pits the characters against rival franchises and enemy factions. This section provides iconic features that can be added to any monster or NPC stat block to make that stat block representative of a specific faction, allowing employees of organizations such as Dran Enterprises or the Six to show off specific training or tactics endemic to those organizations.

Not all monsters or NPCs in the employ of a faction need to have faction features. Lower-ranked members of an organization might have only one iconic feature, with that feature replacing some other aspect of their stat block. Faction leaders and specialist field operatives might have all the iconic features, in addition to the regular features of their stat block. Each set of iconic faction features comes with a list of NPCs that work well as members of that faction, but those are only suggestions.

Many faction features increase the relative challenge of a creature, and thus can increase the threat level of an encounter. Be especially aware of this if you add faction features to multiple foes in a combat encounter, and think about decreasing the number of foes to keep the encounter balanced.

Iconic Dran Enterprises Employee

The iconic employee of Dran Enterprises has two goals over and above all others: serve Dran Enterprises loyally, and prove the superiority of Dran Enterprises over Acquisitions Incorporated. Enemy franchises are to be undermined, defeated, and acquired at any cost.

Recommended NPCs: Bandit captain, guard, veteran (*Monster Manual*); bard, swashbuckler, transmuter, warlock of the archfey (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Corporate Focus. The creature has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and has advantage on Wisdom or Charisma checks made as part of a contest.

Freeze Assets (1/Day). The next time this creature hits with an attack, it can use a bonus action to cause the target of the attack to make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target is paralyzed until the start of its next turn.

Hostile Takeover (1/Day). When a visible attacker within 15 feet of this creature makes an attack roll, this creature uses its reaction to force the attacker to make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. Unless the save succeeds, this creature forces the attack roll to be rerolled against a different target of its choice (other than the attacker) that is within the attack's range.

Iconic Noble Knife Agent

The iconic Noble Knife agent sees Acquisitions Incorporated as just another power-hungry group inevitably getting in the way of their own order's principled stand against tyranny. And maybe a few of the higher-ups in Acq Inc need to be looked at a little more closely in that regard.

Agent of the Noble Knife

Recommended NPCs: Acolyte, mage, spy, thug (*Monster Manual*); archer, enchanter, swashbuckler (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Noble Strike (1/Day). The next time this creature hits with an attack, it can use a bonus action to cause the target of the attack to become frightened. An affected target can make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Ready to Fight. This creature has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that is surprised.

Reality Slip (1/Day). As a reaction when this creature is hit by an attack, it can move up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks, then can make one melee weapon attack.

Iconic Zealot of the Silver Sliver

The iconic zealot of the Silver Sliver is guided by a desire for justice and good, but appears to have no grasp of business or market forces. Zealots hide behind

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their masks as they carry out their pro bono heroics, and chastise other hard-working adventurers at every opportunity.

Recommended NPCs: Berserker, knight, priest (*Monster Manual*); diviner, war priest (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Touch of the Mask (1/Day). As an action, this creature thrusts a mask into the face of another creature within 5 feet of it, forcing that creature to make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the target is stunned until the end of its next turn. A creature that has no face, or whose face is fully covered by a mask or helmet, is immune to this effect.

True Believer (1/Day). As a reaction when this creature fails a saving throw against being charmed, it can reroll the saving throw.

Zealot's Justice (1/Day). As an action, this creature unleashes a cacophony of platitudes that can leave others reeling. Each creature of its choice within 30 feet of it that can hear it must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be restrained. An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

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Silver Sliver Zealot

Iconic Affiliate of the Six

The iconic affiliate of the Six aims not to acquire rival franchises, but to destroy them completely. Affiliates of the Six love to toy with their foes, revealing the full extent of their evil only as they prepare to eradicate those foes.

Recommended NPCs: Bandit captain, berserker, cultist, cult fanatic (*Monster Manual*); blackguard, conjurer, illusionist, warlock of the great old one (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Glimpse of the Beyond (1/Day). As an action, this creature provides a glimpse into its true nature by extolling the madness of the Far Realm. Each creature within 30 feet of this creature that can see and hear it must succeed on a DC 13 Intelligence saving throw or be blinded. An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Something Feels Off (1/Day). When a visible attacker within 5 feet of this creature makes an attack roll against it, it can use its reaction to unleash a pulse of distracting otherworldly power, imposing disadvantage on the attack roll.

Touch of Madness. This creature has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Iconic Franchise Features

The line between competitors and enemies can be razor thin in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign, and franchise members will often find themselves bumping heads with the members of other Acq Inc franchises. Things might even get rough sometimes. It's just business.

The following iconic features can be added to NPC or monster stat blocks to represent company positions similar to those of the characters. These features are inspired by the company positions in chapter 2 but are intended only for quick use in combat encounters, and thus do not recreate all of a position's features in NPC form. DMs creating NPCs who have company positions can use additional position features from chapter 2 for those NPCs as desired.

Other factions such as the Six or Dran Enterprises have employees that take on company positions similar to those adopted by members of Acq Inc. These features can be used for members of those factions as well, either on their own or added to the faction features from the previous section.

A monster or NPC that has a company position always carries the special items granted by that position (a cartographer's *spyglass of clairvoyance* and *cartographer's map case*, a hoardsperson's *living loot satchel*, and so forth). As normal, these items do not function for anyone else, and will be actively sought out by the organization that owns them if they are lost or stolen.

Iconic Cartographer

The iconic cartographer makes a point of knowing the position of every member of their team, understanding the layout of their immediate area and the location of any exits or escape routes.

Recommended NPCs: Acolyte, druid, guard, scout, spy (*Monster Manual*); archer (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Map of Shortcuts (1/Day). As an action, the cartographer produces a map from its *cartographer's map case* that shows useful shortcuts in the immediate area and then vanishes. Each creature of the cartographer's choice that can see the map can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on its next turn.

Iconic Decisionist

The iconic decisionist constantly polls allies and foes during the ongoing battle, getting a read on what everyone thinks, and then explaining how they're all completely wrong.

Recommended NPCs: Bandit captain, knight, scout (*Monster Manual*); archer, enchanter (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Better Odds (1/Day). As an action, this creature flips its *coin of decisionry* to determine the best course of action, choosing a number of creatures that can see and hear it. Each of the target creatures (in addition to this creature) rolls a d4 and adds the number rolled to the next ability check, saving throw, or attack roll it makes.

Iconic Documancer

An iconic documancer acts with the authority of their organization. Documancers constantly speak in legalese, referencing obscure reasons why opponents will fail or should surrender.

Recommended NPCs: Acolyte, mage, priest, veteran (*Monster Manual*); bard (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Scroll Service (1/Day). As an action, the documancer draws a *spell scroll* from its *documancy satchel*. The scroll contains a spell of up to 3rd level of the documancer's choice. Only the documancer can use the scroll, which vanishes after 1 minute.

Iconic Hoardsperson

The iconic hoardsperson flaunts their wealth, knowing that foes are daunted by that which they have failed to earn.

Recommended NPCs: Bandit captain, gladiator (*Monster Manual*); master thief, swashbuckler (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

That Thing You Need (3/Day). The hoardsperson pulls one item of its choice from the *living loot satchel*. This can be any item found on the Adventuring Gear table in chapter 5, "Equipment," of the *Player's Handbook*. The item must be worth no more than 15 gp.

Iconic Loremonger

The iconic loremonger trades in information, even when locked down in battle. A loremonger constantly tries to goad foes into revealing plans and secrets.

Recommended NPCs: Cult fanatic, druid, mage, priest (*Monster Manual*); bard, enchanter (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Whispered Encyclopedia (1/Day). When a visible creature within 20 feet of the loremonger makes an attack roll, a saving throw, or an ability check, the loremonger can use its reaction to impose disadvantage on the roll.

Iconic Obviator

The iconic obviator sees foes as obstacles worthy of respect. Obviators engage in repartee, testing the minds and skills of their opponents as their own strategy is deployed.

Recommended NPCs: Assassin, gladiator, martial arts, priest (*Monster Manual*); adept, swashbuckler (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Read the Opposition (1/Day). As a bonus action, the obviator chooses one other creature it can see, then relays information about the target's tactics to all creatures that can hear this creature. Until the end of the target creature's next turn, attack rolls and contested ability checks made against the target are made with advantage.

Iconic Occultant

The iconic occultant believes that every action changes the world around them, requiring a proper reaction. Occultants attempt to inspire fear in their foes with dire prognostications and mysterious portents.

Recommended NPCs: Berserker, druid, gladiator, knight, and tribal warrior (*Monster Manual*); diviner (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Bead of Instant Karma (1/Day). When a creature the occultant can see makes an attack roll, a saving throw, or an ability check, the occultant can use its reaction to give its choice of advantage or disadvantage to the roll.

Iconic Secretarian

The iconic secretarian treats their foes like customers, offering deals they shouldn't refuse and inviting them to switch allegiances for greater profit and security.

Recommended NPCs: Acolyte, berserker, knight, noble, and priest (*Monster Manual*); bard, warlock of the archfey (*Volo's Guide to Monsters*)

Charming Introduction (1/Day). As an action, the secretarian hands a business card from its *portfolio keeper* to a creature within 5 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by the secretarian, as if under the effect of the *charm person* spell.

Appendix C: Vehicles

Franchisees in an Acquisitions Incorporated campaign might gain access to—or find themselves under attack from—either of the unique vehicles in this section. Both are created and loaned out by Head Office, sometimes even at reasonable rates.

Battle Balloon

Through the winter clouds that surround the castle on this desolate hill, you see a shape emerge. Something so gigantic, you can't believe it can actually fly.

Airships are relatively rare in Acquisitions Incorporated, which is thought to hold no more than five in its fleet. But the unparalleled usefulness of these craft in commerce—and in combat—makes the company-standard battle balloon a much-coveted upgrade for any franchise.

Origins and Operations. Professional secrecy and aggressive marketing make it unclear where the airship originated. Some say battle balloons were an original design created by the Heuristic Arcane Research and Development department of Acquisitions Incorporated. But the wizards of Halruaa developed similar skyships in ages past, and the Cult of the Dragon has been seen with flying ships of its own. Still, among the small number of factions and organizations known to possess or build airships, Acquisitions Incorporated might be the best known for its high-profile aerial escapades. It's certain that neither the mages of Halruaa nor the members of the Cult of the Dragon ever crewed a battle balloon with keg robots, or used one to squash a tyrannosaurus flat.

Flying Battle Vehicle. The standard design of an Acquisitions Incorporated-grade airship features an enormous balloon covered in a rope net. Trailing lines connect the balloon to the vessel of metal and wood suspended below. In the center of the deck, directly below the balloon, sits a large magic furnace, whose

The Hard Cloud

The Hard Cloud is Acquisitions Incorporated's company flagship, and as such, bears special note. The great battle balloon bristles with armaments, including a vicious dragon-slaying spear at the fore that has seen use more than once. *The Hard Cloud* is a veteran of numerous combat operations, and it has so far come out in one piece. Beyond the tales told of the vessel's exploits, rumors abound regarding the wondrous vehicle. Is it powered by a bound efreeti, as some have said? Does the hold contain clones of every high-ranking member of Acquisitions Incorporated, including Omin Dran himself? Does the mess, in fact, employ a terrifying ghostly chef? The answers lie below decks, where few have had the opportunity to learn the truth.

formidable lifting power is rumored to involve trapped elementals. The airship's captain controls the arcane furnace and directs forward thrust by way of a propeller located at the back of the ship, helming the craft with a wheel positioned in the bow. Metal runners below the ship allow a battle balloon to land on the ground.

Options and Armaments. Each franchise or organization customizes the offensive capability of its airships, but most battle balloons feature multiple harpoon guns, perfect for fighting and snaring aerial threats. Battle balloons that see a lot of combat are typically well stocked with other ranged weapons and polearms for ship-to-ship and crew-to-crew fighting.

Whether privately financed or loaned out by Head Office under extraordinarily cautious terms, battle balloons can be customized with unique equipment—different siege weapons, lifting and cargo gear, and so forth—to make each airship unique. However, the most potent weapon featured on most Acquisitions Incorporated battle balloons is the green flame arbalester, a massive ballista whose bolts pulse with arcane power and detonate with formidable explosive force wherever they hit.

Vehicle Rules

Battle balloons and mechanical beholders are vehicles, and as such, they have special rules associated with them. Most pertinently, a vehicle has the six ability scores (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma) and the corresponding modifiers. The Strength of a vehicle expresses its size and weight. Dexterity represents its ease of handling. A vehicle's Constitution covers its durability and the quality of its construction. Vehicles usually have a score of 0 in Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma. If a vehicle has a 0 in a score, it automatically fails any ability check or saving throw that uses that score. How a vehicle is crewed and what actions it can take on its turn are described in the stat block for the vehicle.

Mobile Franchise Headquarters. A battle balloon is perhaps the most sought-after of the mobile headquarters options available to Acquisitions Incorporated franchises. The versatility of an airship allows for the rapid shipping of goods, mercenaries, and loot. Such a vessel also allows a quick escape from sticky developments and deals gone bad.

Battle Balloon

Gargantuan Vehicle (80 ft. x 20 ft.)

Creature Capacity 20 crew, 10 passengers
Cargo Capacity 1 ton
Travel Pace 9 miles per hour (216 miles per day)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	0	0	0

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Actions

On its turn the battle balloon can take 3 actions if it has twenty or more crew, 2 actions if it has ten or more crew, or 1 action if it has fewer than ten crew, choosing from the options below. It cannot take any actions if it has no remaining crew.

Fire Ballista. The battle balloon can fire its harpoon guns.
Fire Green Flame Arbalester. The battle balloon can fire its green flame arbalester.
Move. The battle balloon can use its helm to move using its propeller. If the battle balloon enters a Large or smaller creature's space, that creature is automatically pushed to the edge of the battle balloon's space. The creature must also succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage.
Harpoon Haul. The battle balloon can pull each target grappled by it up to 30 feet toward the battle balloon.

Hull

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 200 (damage threshold 15)

Control: Helm

Armor Class 18
Hit Points 50

Move up to the speed of the ship's propeller, with one 90-degree turn. If the helm is destroyed, the ship can't turn.

Control: Balloon

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 75

If its balloon is destroyed, a battle balloon cannot maintain altitude.

Movement: Propeller

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 100; –5 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Speed (air) 80 ft.; 50 ft. while flying into the wind; 100 ft. while flying with the wind

Weapon: Green Flame Arbalester

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 75
Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, range 200/800 ft. (can't hit targets within 60 ft. of it), one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage and 22 (4d10) fire damage. If the attack misses, the DM determines where the arbalester bolt hits. Each creature within 10 feet of that spot must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to avoid the bolt as it shatters, taking 5 (1d10) piercing damage and 5 (1d10) fire damage on a failed save.

Weapon: Harpoon Gun (3)

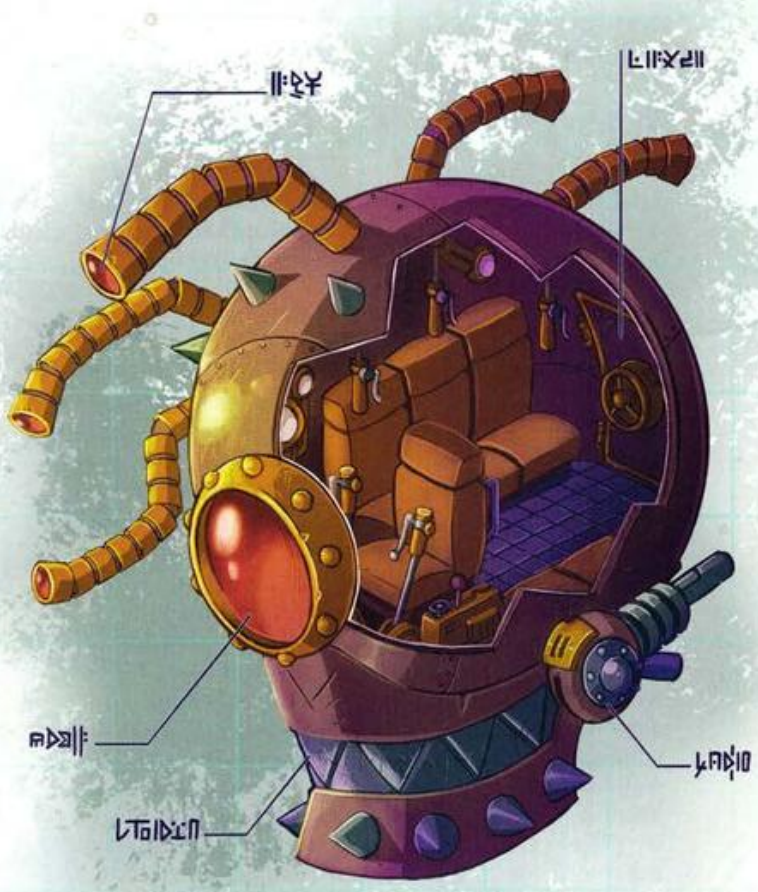
Armor Class 15
Hit Points 50
Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16). Until the grapple ends, the target's speed is halved, and it can't move farther away from the battle balloon. Each of the battle balloon's harpoon guns can grapple one target. While it has one or more targets grappled with its harpoon gun attack, the battle balloon's speed is not halved.

Mechanical Beholder

When you hear the mechanical beholder click to life, it sounds like death itself snapping its fingers.

A mechanical beholder takes the form of an oversized eye tyrant whose central eye is a viewport window. Part conveyance, part laboratory, and part siege engine, the vehicle can transport up to six humanoids through any terrain or medium, including underwater and through solid stone. A complex and often dangerous manipulation of gears, levers, and buttons controlled the original mechanical beholders, but more recent models feature magical controls that respond to voice commands—though not always accurately.

Equipment and Options. The mechanical beholder can be outfitted with a variety of sensors, probes, and gauges, allowing for functions as varied as determining alchemical composition, picking up on magical auras, or making masterfully dry martinis. Its range of armaments includes a disintegration ray modeled after that of its monstrous namesake (which for reasons of liability is advertised as being designed exclusively for waste removal). Portholes and hatches allow characters inside the beholder to make ranged and magical attacks from within it.



Mechanical Beholder

Huge vehicle (15 ft. by 15 ft.)

Creature Capacity 1 crew, 5 passengers
Cargo Capacity crew and passengers' normal gear
Travel Pace 3 miles per hour (72 miles per day)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	0	0	0

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Actions

On its turn the mechanical beholder can take 1 action. It cannot take any actions if it has no crew.

Eye Rays. The mechanical beholder can use its eye ray tentacles.
Move. The mechanical beholder can use its helm to move using its magical propulsion unit.

Hull

Armor Class 18
Hit Points 200 (damage threshold 10)

Control: Helm

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 25

Move up to the speed of the ship's magical propulsion unit, with one 90-degree turn. The helm can be attacked only if the hull has taken 100 or more damage. If the helm is destroyed, the mechanical beholder can't move.

Movement: Magical Propulsion Unit

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 100; –5 ft. speed per 25 damage taken
Speed (magical) burrowing speed 30 ft., flying speed 30 ft. (hover), swimming speed 30 ft.

Weapon: Eye Ray Tentacles (6)

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 50
Magical Attack: The mechanical beholder shoots the following magical eye rays at up to three targets that would be visible to the crew and are within 120 feet of it.

Disintegration Ray. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) force damage. If this damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, its body becomes a pile of fine gray dust. If the target is a Large or smaller nonmagical object or creation of magical force, it is disintegrated without a saving throw. If the target is a Huge or larger object or creation of magical force, this ray disintegrates a 10-foot cube of it.

Enervation Ray. The targeted creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Paralyzing Ray. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

CHRIS WALTON

Appendix D: Orrery and Components

This section details the artifact known as the *Orrery of the Wanderer* and its six magic clockwork components, all of which are central to the adventure in chapter 4.

Orrery of the Wanderer

Wondrous item, artifact (requires attunement)

This delicate and exquisitely crafted clockwork orrery features multiple geared components whose sweeping hands and dials represent the complex interplay of planar and magical realms. Standing two feet high, the orrery housing is a wondrous device imbued with magic of its own, but the power of its six clockwork components makes the artifact even more potent.

The *Orrery of the Wanderer* was created by a renowned clockwork mage known only as Lottie. She crafted the relic as a means of tapping into the power of the planes, and to channel the divination and foretelling powers of the stars. But Lottie soon realized that her creation was far more powerful than she had intended. As it tapped into planar magic, the orrery began to manifest the darkness and malevolence inherent to some of the planes. Eventually, it would impress upon its owner a desire to open portals into the most cursed and dangerous worlds, including the Far Realm.

To prevent the orrery from ever being so used, Lottie scattered the components that powered it, secreting them across the world. But the orrery's instinct for survival is strong, and its components have a way of inexorably coming together over decades or centuries, found by treasure hunters, stolen by monsters, found and stolen again—and moving closer to each other all the time.

Random Properties. The orrery has the following randomly determined properties:

- 2 minor beneficial properties
- 1 major beneficial property
- 1 major detrimental property

The random properties of the orrery might function only when all its components are installed, or might function sporadically if any components are missing.

The Sum of Its Parts. Each of the six components that powers the *Orrery of the Wanderer* is a powerful magic relic in its own right:

The chronolometer
The dimensional loop
The far gear
The rotor of return
The timepiece of travel
The wheel of stars

Creatures can attune to the orrery's components individually. If attuned to an individual component, a creature must hold the component to make use of its features. A creature can also attune to the orrery and all the components installed in it. Attuning to an installed component doesn't count against the number of magic items you can normally attune to.

While a component is not installed in the orrery, its magic might function sporadically or with unpredictable side effects, as determined by the DM.

Future Echoes. With or without its components, the orrery lets you catch momentary glimpses of the future that warn you of danger. As long as the orrery is within 30 feet of you, you gain a +1 bonus to AC.

Into the Void. With or without its components, the attuned orrery infuses your spirit with the tumultuous energy of the planes. Over time, your alignment changes to chaotic neutral, and you are compelled to engage with and explore the most dangerous planar realms.

Master of Travel. While all six components of the *Orrery of the Wanderer* are installed, the artifact has 7 charges. While touching the orrery, you can use an action and expend 1 or more charges to cast one of the following spells (save DC 17): *contact other plane* (3 charges), *demiplane* (6 charges), *gate* (7 charges), *plane shift* (5 charges), or *teleportation circle* (3 charges). The orrery regains 1d4 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn.

Chronolometer

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While attuned to this device, you have a +1 bonus to Intelligence saving throws. The first time you attune to the *chronolometer*, you choose one language you don't know. You subsequently know that language while attuned to the device.

Time Bandit. At the start of your turn, roll a d6 (no action required). On a 1–3, you slow down time, gaining an additional action on your turn and doubling your speed until the end of the turn. On a 4–6, you go forward in time to warn yourself of what is to come. The next time you fail a saving throw, attack roll, or ability check, you can reroll the check and take either result. Once you use this feature of the *chronolometer*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Fate Swap. As a reaction when a creature you can see within 30 feet of you takes damage, that creature gains an additional action if it is the creature's turn, or can take an action immediately even though it isn't the creature's turn. Once you use this feature of the *chronolometer*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Part of a Whole. While this component is not installed in the *Orrery of the Wanderer*, its magic might function sporadically or with unpredictable side effects, as determined by the DM.

Dimensional Loop

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While attuned to this device, you have a +1 bonus to Strength saving throws, and you have darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. If you already have darkvision, its range increases by 30 feet.

Dimensional Cloak. As a bonus action, you send your body out of phase with the material world for 1 minute, granting you advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks

made to hide, and imposing disadvantage on attack rolls against you. Once you use this feature of the *dimensional loop*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Fold Space. Choose a space you can see within 60 feet of you (no action required). You treat that space as if it were within 5 feet of you until the end of your turn. This allows you to move immediately to that space without provoking opportunity attacks, or to interact with objects or creatures in that space as though they were next to you (including allowing you to make melee attacks into that space). Once you use this feature of the *dimensional loop*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Part of a Whole. While this component is not installed in the *Orrery of the Wanderer*, its magic might function sporadically or with unpredictable side effects, as determined by the DM.

Far Gear

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While attuned to this device, you have a +1 bonus to Charisma saving throws, and you have advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks.

Aberrant Ally. You can conjure an aberrant creature from the chaos of the multiverse to serve you. This functions as the *conjure celestial* spell (no concentration required), except the creature you summon is an aberration of challenge rating 4 or lower. Once you use this feature of the *far gear*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Unnatural Bane. You can cast the *bane* spell (save DC 15), which affects any number of creatures within range for 1 minute. Once you use this feature of the *far gear*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Part of a Whole. While this component is not installed in the *Orrery of the Wanderer*, its magic might function sporadically or with unpredictable side effects, as determined by the DM.

Rotor of Return

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While attuned to this device, you have a +1 bonus to Constitution saving throws. You periodically receive flashbacks of old memories, and you can unerringly recall any event that took place within the previous 30 days.

Borrow Object. You name a mundane item with a value of 50 gp or less and it appears in your hand or at your feet. This can be any item that appears in chapter 5, "Equipment," of the *Player's Handbook*, or any similar item selected with the DM's permission. The summoned item is transported to you from somewhere else in the world, but it is generic in nature, so that you might call for a longsword but you cannot borrow a specific creature's longsword. The item vanishes 10 minutes after it appears. Once you use this feature of the *rotor of return*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Recall Code. As an action, you can set your current location as a point of return locked to the rotor. Anytime thereafter, you can use a bonus action to teleport to the rotor's point of return as long as you are within 500 feet of that point. Once you use the *rotor of return* to teleport, this feature cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Part of a Whole. While this component is not installed in the *Orrery of the Wanderer*, its magic might function sporadically or with unpredictable side effects, as determined by the DM.

Timepiece of Travel

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While attuned to this device, you have a +1 bonus to Dexterity saving throws and you always know which way is north. Additionally, you can cast the *longstrider* spell on yourself at will.

Turn-by-Turn Directions. You can name any location within 10 miles of your current location that is known to at least one creature also within 10 miles of that location (including you). Once you name the location, a disembodied voice heard only by you provides directions to the location by the safest, most direct route. The voice knows to avoid natural hazards, so that it does not send you through trackless wilderness or into a lake. But it has no knowledge of or ability to help you avoid monsters, enemies, traps, locked doors, and the like.

The timepiece is of no use for reaching locations that are wholly secret or not known to any creatures within range. Once you use this feature of the *timepiece of travel*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Get Away From It All. As an action, you can cast the *teleport* spell. Once you use this feature of the *timepiece of travel*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Part of a Whole. While this component is not installed in the *Orrery of the Wanderer*, its magic might function sporadically or with unpredictable side effects, as determined by the DM.

Wheel of Stars

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While attuned to this device, you have a +1 bonus to Wisdom saving throws, and you can use an action to cast the *dancing lights*, *guidance*, or *message* cantrips.

Portent of the Stars. As a reaction when a creature you can see within 60 feet of you makes an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check, you make that creature roll a d10 and add or subtract the number rolled (your choice) from the roll. Once you use this feature of the *wheel of stars*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

Alter Gravity. As an action, you can cast *fly* on yourself or you can cast *levitate* (save DC 15). Once you use this feature of the *wheel of stars*, it cannot be used again until the next dawn.

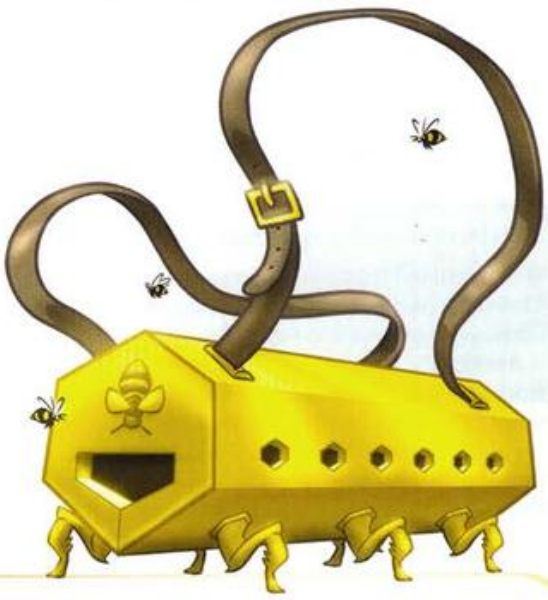
Part of a Whole. While this component is not installed in the *Orrery of the Wanderer*, its magic might function sporadically or with unpredictable side effects, as determined by the DM.

Appendix E: Trinkets

Worried that you're going to pull out your dead sprite inside a clear glass bottle at a company function only to discover that three other people in the franchise have one as well? Then consider rolling on the Acquisitions Incorporated Trinkets table instead of the table in chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*, to gain a unique trinket at character creation with a bit of Acq Inc flair.

Acquisitions Incorporated Trinkets

d100	Trinket
1	A perfect skipping stone
2	Three weighted dice that always roll low
3	A locket with a picture of Jim Darkmagic
4	A tiny anvil and smith's hammer
5	A nonfunctional *immovable rod*
6	A DIY acupuncture kit
7	A stuffed owlbear toy
8	A diagram for a new war lute
9	A declaration of war against a nation no one has ever heard of
10	A pipe that emits green smoke
11	A glass eye
12	The centerpiece of a priceless chandelier
13	A fine cane with a secret compartment
14	A letter written by Rosie Beestinger
15	A coin that always lands on its edge
16	The deed and title to an abandoned windmill and three acres of tillable land that you've never been able to find
17	A menu from Big Daddy Donaar's Yum Yum Hut
18	A small purse that screams loudly when opened
19	A deep-crow-feather quill
20	A pair of breeches that always smells faintly of honey
21	A one-armed Viari doll (*Apocalypse Dagger* accessory missing)
22	A leather pouch filled with various finger bones of unknown provenance
23	The collar of your childhood pet, Nutmeg
24	A seashell that, when pressed to the ear, speaks in flowing rhymes
25	A recipe book for cooking with mushrooms
26	One expired coupon for "A Free Cornerstone"
27	A portable beehive
28	Goggles that literally tint everything rose colored
29	A *wand of wonder* that allows you to cast only *mending*
30	A bracelet woven from mistletoe
31	A curved claw from an unknown beast that small children are always frightened of
32	A longsword that can be folded down in 1 minute and hidden in your pocket
33	A living graft of what you believe to be the World Tree
34	A tattered scarf with the Acquisitions Incorporated logo
35	A box containing a torn-up letter
36	An old contract marked "Void"



d100	Trinket
37	A small pigeon in a cage
38	An Acquisitions Incorporated "Green Flame" foam finger
39	A "C" Team lunchbox
40	A potted plant that grows different fruit on every branch
41	A book of adventures for children
42	An Omin action figure with detachable maul and holy symbol
43	A pint glass engraved with a picture of a keg robot
44	A giant hockey puck
45	A miniature cannon that actually fires
46	A very fancy red scarf and matching handkerchief
47	An arrow once shot by Môrgæn
48	A purple worm toy
49	A burned doll whose eyes follow you around the room
50	An infinite inkwell
51	A band embroidered with the symbol of the Six
52	A squishy cactus
53	A velvet blindfold
54	A dirty figurine of a triceratops that can't be cleaned
55	A used (and thus nonmagical) *noble knife* from the Noble Knife
56	A quill that rotates through all the colors of the rainbow
57	A twenty-sided die that only rolls the number 4
58	A pointed hat that glows in the dark
59	A cup that hums when filled with water
60	A mug fashioned from the skull of someone else's enemy
61	A small glass jar containing an immortal firefly
62	A fake mustache made from gnome facial hair
63	A petrified troll finger
64	Half of a map
65	The other half of a map
66	An unreasonable amount of pocket lint
67	A dozen flyers for a local gnome food place
68	Omin Dran's business card
69	A lock of hair from a changeling
70	A marble that rolls uphill
71	A piece of parchment listing a command word for a powerful magic item
72	A book titled *Conversational Giant*
73	A user's manual for an *apparatus of Kwalish*
74	A signed headshot of famous bard Spice Caraway
75	The eye of a basilisk in a crystal box
76	A postcard from Ravnica
77	A stamp collection
78	A small piece of solidified smoke
79	A six-sided die that sometimes rolls a seven
80	A left-hand gauntlet
81	A music box that plays nursery rhymes
82	A locket that's bigger on the outside than the inside
83	A potted plant that grows hair instead of leaves
84	A collection of teeth
85	A coin whose minting date always shows three years in the future
86	A green drinking horn taken from a very large bull
87	A small book containing pressed and dried botanical samples
88	A hatched chimera egg
89	A slightly used red bandit mask
90	A tiny stirge encased in amber
91	A large bottle of Red Larch Ale that can't be opened
92	A cane topped with a stylized golden bulldog
93	A note in your own hand that you don't remember writing
94	A sprig of herbs from your family's garden
95	A tankard stolen from the Dran & Courtier
96	A small, severed tentacle preserved in alcohol
97	A walnut with a face drawn on it
98	A small flask of liquid from the Lake of Radiant Mists
99	An ice cube that never melts
00	An expertly carved sword hilt with the blade snapped cleanly off

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Help Wanted

The Forgotten Realms are full of powerful factions vying for control, and for a time, each has had the upper hand. The Harpers. The Zhentarim. The Lords' Alliance. The Order of the Gauntlet. The Emerald Enclave. I might be forgetting one or two. There's a bunch of these things.

If none of those organizations can help you, consider Acquisitions Incorporated. Called "Faerûn's Definitive Adventuring Brand" by ... well, by the company itself, they've been in operation for more than a decade, and it's mostly been fine. For them. I should emphasize that it's been fine for them specifically. It's not always fine for the people who hire them, and it's definitely not fine for the people they're hired to rob.

Truth is, though, when you're just starting out in the adventuring business, it might be nice to have a leg up. It can be a big help to have access to the powerful artifacts, expertise, and jobs that Acquisitions Incorporated has to offer a new franchise. Plus, there are always openings available.

Just try not to think about why.

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DungeonsandDragons.com

ISBN 978-0-7869-6690-3
9 780786 966903
Printed in USA